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山形石雄

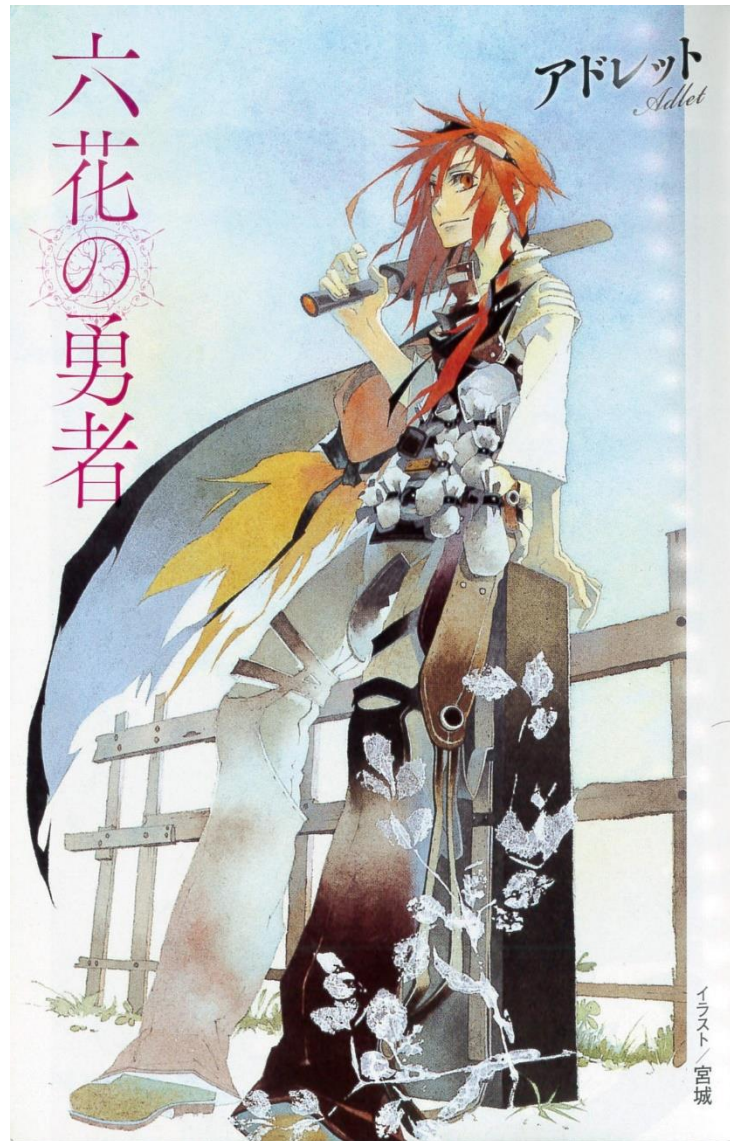
宮城

花の勇者

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コミック

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Adlet

A young boy who calls himself the strongest man in the world. He fights with a mastery of various secret weapons.

Character Introductions



Nashetania

Though she is the princess of the large kingdom Piena, she is a wild and free girl, full of mischief. She is the Saint of Blades.

Character Introductions



Fremy

A girl whose cool indifference won't allow others to get close. As the Saint of Gunpowder she uses guns and bullets in battle.

Character Introductions



Goldof

A young knight completely devoted to Nashetania, he wields a giant spear.

Character Introductions



Chamo

A proud girl who is called the most powerful warrior of the current age. She is the Saint of Swamps.

Character Introductions



Hans

A strange man who mimics a cat as he talks. He fences with an unworldly and peculiar skill.

Character Introductions



Mora

An extremely serious and intellectual woman. She serves as the leader of the Saints and is the Saint of Mountains.

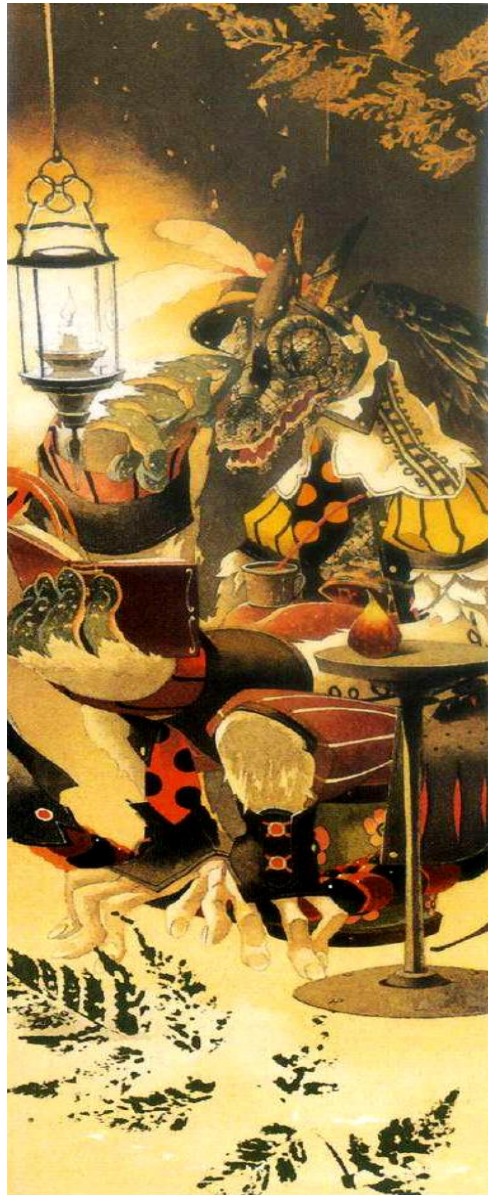


ロロニア
Rolonia

Rolonia

A newly arrived Hero of the Six Flowers who is a timid, but good-natured girl. She is the Saint of Fresh Blood.

The Commanders



テグネウ
Tgurneu

Tgurneu

One of the Kyoma commanders. He excels in ingenuity and has set up various traps.

(Pronounced Teguneu)



Cargikk

???



Dozzu

???



The “Seventh” Flower has left, but a girl named Rolonia appeared, once again adding a seventh person to the Heroes of the Six Flowers.

Meanwhile the deadline for The Majin’s revival approaches, and unable to get rid of their suspicions, the heroes advance into The Wailing Demon Territory.

There a Kyoma appears and gives Mora the warning, “You have no time.”

And on top of that, one of the Kyoma commanders named Tgurneu suddenly appears before the heroes.

Does this have to do with the “seventh’s” plot!?

Within their confusion a fierce battle begins. Challenged by destiny, battling a mystery, volume two of this explosive fantasy begins!



Prologue

Adlet had been running across the dry, craggy earth, with rocks spread all over it. In fact, he was devoting all of his energy into the run as he trampled over the wilting weeds that were sparsely sticking out of the ground.

He was on the peninsula jutting out of the western edge of the continent called The Wailing Demon Territory. It was where The Majin and the Kyoma resided. And at the moment Adlet was in the eastern section, in a land called The Valley of the Bleeding Lung.

Though it was night, Adlet continued under the moonlight. The only thing he had to illuminate the way was the light given off by the jewel mounted into his armor's chest plate.

"Hurry!" Adlet shouted as he ran.

There were three lights behind him, belonging to Fremy, Chamo, and Goldof, who were all following him. He was out of breath, his heart was throbbing violently, his lips were trembling, and he wasn't able to control his legs properly. But putting all his energy into the run wasn't the cause. It was the fact that they were on the verge of confronting a nightmare.

"Hans! Rolonia! Where are you?!" Adlet called out, but no response came back from the deep darkness.

"Are you dead?! Hans! Rolonia! Answer me!" As Adlet shouted he jumped onto a cliff in front of him. Both his hands and feet found their way into the indentations of the cliff and in the blink of an eye he started to scale up the rock.

As he climbed, he unintentionally looked at the back of his hand. On it laid the proof he was one of the heroes fated to save the world, the crest of the Six Flowers, which always gave off a faint light.

However, one of the petals was missing on the crest. And that meant one of the heroes had lost their life.

"Hans!"

Adlet kicked up the cliff side and leaped through the air. As he flew he drew his sword, then landed atop the cliff and assumed a battle stance. But the sight he saw the instant his jewel's light illuminated the cliff top put him at a loss for words.

Hans Humpty. The unusual assassin who fought while imitating a cat. A man possessing the crest of the Six Flowers was on the ground, his face looking up to the sky. One of the arteries in his neck had been ripped open and his blood was spilled all over the parched earth creating a repulsive sight. And as for his face, all the blood had completely drained from it.

"...Hans." Adlet dropped his sword. He couldn't believe what he was seeing. He had placed absolute trust in Hans' overwhelming strength and quick wit.

"...You were too late Adlet," a woman standing slightly apart from Hans said quietly. She was standing with her back facing Adlet; the woman went by the name of Mora Chester.

"Hans, it can't be...."

Fremy followed Adlet up the cliff, with Goldof appearing after. Upon seeing the situation, they immediately pointed their weapons towards Mora.

"This situation probably doesn't even need an explanation. I just killed Hans," Mora confessed as she turned around.

Her face, chest, and both of her unarmored hands were all covered in blood. Even her armor was broken all over. It seemed like an ordinary person would have died a long time ago from the same injuries.

"Mora, it was you..."

"That's right...I'm the seventh." Her voice was dispirited, as if she were exhausted. She then raised her hands, quietly kneeled down, and hung her head powerlessly.

No one could make a sound after that. There was only silence.

#

Adlet stared at the kneeling Mora, completely at a loss for words. It was a state shared by Fremy, Chamo, and Goldof behind him. But there was another person there bearing the crest of the Six Flowers, and she was sitting at Hans' side.

"...Rolonia," Adlet called out.

Her name was Rolonia Manchetta. With the ability to manipulate blood, she was the Saint of Fresh Blood. And she was also the eighth person to appear with the crest of the Six Flowers.

She had a round face, glasses, and often wore a timid expression. On top of that she was short and small and in no way could she be seen as an excellent warrior. In fact, if she wasn't clad in heavy armor, or didn't have a long whip attached to her hip, she would look just like a village girl.

At the moment her hands were touching Hans' chest and throat, her palms glowing slightly.

"How did Hans lose?" Adlet asked her, but Rolonia didn't answer. She just stared at Hans' body.

"Rolonia answer! Why is Hans dead?! What happened?!"

Adlet then noticed that Rolonia was muttering something. He drew close to her face and listened to both her breathing and the words spilling out from her mouth.

"Please don't die...please don't die...I will definitely help...you..."

Rolonia was the Saint of Fresh Blood so she could control a person's blood to heal wounds. So, not wanting to disturb her, Adlet touched Hans' wrist. He had no pulse and he was cold.

It's impossible, Rolonia, Adlet thought. There was almost no blood left in Hans' body, plus his heart had stopped. Hans was already dead.

"What's the meaning of this? Why is Hans dead, but you're unharmed?" Adlet asked.

He wanted to know why Rolonia didn't fight the seventh, Mora. And what's more, he wondered why Mora didn't attack the defenseless girl.

However, Rolonia was focusing solely on trying to help Hans. It was as if she completely couldn't see what was happening around her.

"Rolonia, you must have been traveling together with Hans. What in the world happened?" Fremy asked her. Yet even her words didn't seem to reach Rolonia's ears.

"I will help...I'll help, you'll see. If I can't..."

Chamo then strolled towards Mora while wearing her usual carefree smile. It was as if she weren't paying any attention to the fact that Hans had died.

"Ah...Cat-san died? That's too bad." Chamo looked down at the kneeling Mora.

"Chamo quite liked Cat-san. He was cute, strong, and he talked amusingly. Though at first Chamo hated him after he hit Chamo very hard, over time traveling with him became a little fun."

Chamo made a fist and struck Mora in the face. Her fist was small though so Mora's face only moved slightly.

"I will never forgive you. I will kill you. I won't let you have a normal death!"

Mora averted her gaze from the angry girl in front of her. "I don't care if you kill me. I'm ready."

"Really? Obachan's prepared to die? Well, Chamo's extremely disappointed."

Chamo raised her fist again, but Fremy grabbed it and stopped her.

"Before that, give us some time to hear her out," Fremy said to Chamo, then turned to Mora. Her eye was full of silent anger. "Talk Mora and make it as brief as possible. When you're finished, we'll kill you."

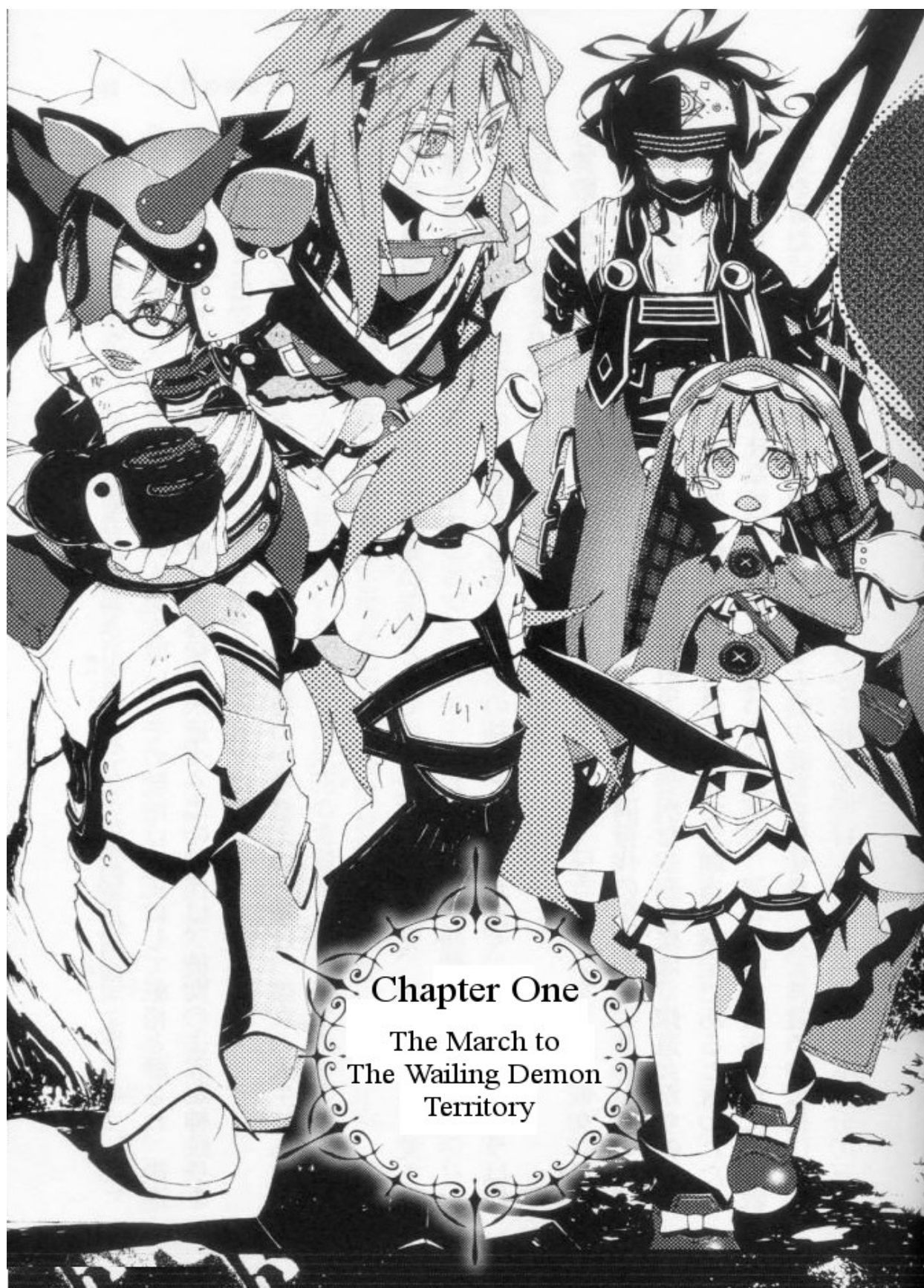
Looking down to the ground, Mora spoke. "I didn't hope for this to happen. I didn't want to kill him. I didn't want to kill Hans or anyone."

"What are you talking about?"

"But I couldn't think of what to do other than kill him. All paths other than killing Hans had been closed." A single tear fell from Mora's eye. "I wanted to protect the world. I wanted to defeat the Kyoma alongside all of you and prevent The Majin's revival."

"Chamo doesn't believe you," Chamo said, but Adlet disagreed. Mora wasn't lying, she was speaking from her true feelings.

"And only until yesterday, no, only until an hour ago, I had intended to do just that."



Chapter One: Part One

Mora Chester. The Saint of Mountains and the current head of all the venerable temples in world.

She was extremely popular among the Saints and no one questioned her competency. While many considered her governing fair she was also strict and had demonstrated excellent skill in leading her juniors. As the time of The Majin's awakening neared, people talked about how her being selected as the leader of the temples was extremely fortunate for mankind.

So why did Mora kill Hans Humpty? A part of that answer lies in her history.

#

Mora was bestowed with a blessed life. Born in the country of snow-capped mountains, she was the youngest of nine children. She was born into a wealthy village tree business and had been raised with love by her parents, brothers, and the company's employees.

Mora's father had deep ties with the temple of the Mountain where the business' bodyguards came from, and through that connection Mora entered the temple as an acolyte. She was 13 at the time.

Living at the temple was busy and strict, but it wasn't hard for Mora. She was a serious girl and she excelled even in school. She was even more capable of regulating her own behavior and habits compared to other girls in her generation.

When Mora was 19 the previous Saint of Mountains retired and Mora was chosen as the next Saint from the group of acolytes. She was the greatest from the multitudes of acolytes and it was said that she was the best candidate.

After that Mora's unique qualities started to blossom, and within three years she gained the fighting abilities and strength to be considered among the top five most powerful Saints. Her high level abilities were shown to the managed territories under the temple's control and when Mora was 26 she was appointed the head of all the temples in the world. Receiving a nomination from Leura, the previous Temple Head, Mora was recommended by three-fourths of the 78 Saints.

Mora basically had everything a person would want to acquire or wish for. Popularity, fame, status, authority, and wealth. And in having those she also had genuine power.

However, for Mora all of those were of little importance. Since there were no other suitable people, the head of the temple's seat was nothing more than a position Mora had no choice but to take over. Popularity and fame were also not that important. Wealth was only good for ensuring that one didn't live a difficult life. And if it became unnecessary, she could throw away even the immense power of the Saint of Mountains at any time.

No, for Mora there was something else that was more important.

#

Three years before The Majin's awakening, Mora was at Piena's goddess arena. The same place where later Adlet would cause a massive uproar.

"Princess! How many times do I have to tell you! It doesn't matter how many blades you conjure if they don't hit the target."

Mora was there with three young Saints. The girls were the next generation of those aiming to be the Heroes of the Six Flowers and were being instructed by Mora. At that time, training them was Mora's most important job.

"What do you think about this?" The Saint of Blades, Nashetania, conjured blades from the ground one after another, and then launched them all at Mora without mercy.

However, even though the blades were indeed flashy, they were slow. And they also weren't accurate enough, so Mora was able to casually deflect each blade with her armored fist.

"You're not controlling your energy. And though that might work on weaker enemies, it will fail against stronger opponents. Next!"

"Alright boss! Today I'm going to beat you to a pulp.¹"

The next to challenge Mora was Welynn², the Saint of Salt. She possessed the power to change anything she struck into clumps of salt.

But even though just one strike from her fist would mean certain death, it was meaningless if her fists couldn't hit their mark. As she was a bit on the tall side, Mora was able to dodge the simple attack just by moving her upper body. Then in that opening Mora tripped up Welynn. And as the young Saint stumbled, Mora kicked her and sent her flying.

"Your attacks are too simplistic. And if you don't learn how to attack from far away you'll never develop. Next!"

"Huh? No way. You're the leader of the temples. You're way too strong."

The Saint of Fire, Lenelle, used the fire she created to attack Mora. However, Mora just waved both of her hands, scattering the flames and knocking Lenelle back from the recoil.

"Was that all your power?! Offer your prayers to the God of Fire. It will increase your strength."

¹ ぎたぎた

² The Japanese name reads Ueron, but like the other names in this series I tried to Romanize them in a way that would seem less Japanese and also be more pronounceable in line with the author's English translations of the main characters' names.

Mora was about to call for the next warrior, but then she realized that there was no one else. Nashetania the Saint of Blades, Welynn the Saint of Salt, and Lenelle the Saint of Fire had all been beaten.

"Weaklings, band together and come at me."

The three then stood and launched their attacks at Mora. Their intensive training continued until the three young Saints couldn't move anymore.

#

It was evening by the time the instruction had ended. Mora walked down the halls of the goddess arena alone, while Nashetania and the other Saints headed over to the doctors.

Nashetania possessed formidable talent and in three years she would probably surpass Mora in strength. Welynn on the other hand still had room to grow. But Mora felt that Lenelle's development may be reaching a plateau, which made her wonder whether she should order her to retire so that she could raise a new Saint of Fire or if it was better to wait for Lenelle to shed her weak exterior.³

While she walked, Mora continued to consider how to raise a superior warrior and how to help them develop to the point where they could defeat The Majin.

³ それともリーンリルが一皮むけるのを待つほうが良いか

However, after she exited the arena and started to walk through Piena's extravagant royal family temple her thoughts of battle gradually began to disappear. She even started to forget the impending battle with The Majin.

"Sheniera. I'm back. Were you a good girl today?"

When Mora opened the door to a guest room, located, contrary to her expectations, in a corner of the royal residence, a girl tottered into her chest. And at that moment Mora changed from a warrior who bore the fate of protecting the world on her shoulders to just a mother.

"Sheniera, what did you do for fun today?"

"I played sugoroku⁴ with daddy."

"Sugoroku huh? I want to play with you too. Ooh there's a cute girl."

Mora picked up and hugged her only beloved daughter. Feeling her daughter had gotten a bit heavier, Mora's expression softened.

"Oh, you're heavy, you're heavy."

⁴ A dice game. However, in English to "Play Dice" usually has a gambling connotation.

"Sheniera's not a pampered child," a man said as Mora cuddled her daughter. He then walked into the room, a man in the prime of his life with silver hairs blended into his hair.

"When you're here Sheniera becomes a completely different person."

His name was Gunner Chester and he was Mora's husband, older than her by 12 years.

The Saints weren't obligated to remain single and close to half of the 78 Saints had families. Plus, it wasn't rare for even the acolytes that were Saint candidates to have lovers or husbands. Even Mora's marriage to Gunner had happened before she had inherited the power of the Saint of Mountains.

"Sheniera, your mother is tired. Come here." Gunner embraced his daughter and lifted her out of her mother's arms.

"I don't mind, I don't mind this. Well Sheniera, play with your mother," Mora said as she took back Sheniera from Gunner.

Seeing Sheniera laugh as Mora lifted her playfully high up into the air, Gunner shrugged. "Alright, but it's your fault Sheniera is being raised as a pampered child."

"What are you saying? Is there something wrong with being pampered? Hey Sheniera, swing!"

Mora dangled Sheniera then gently shook her left and right. She was sorry that she was ignoring her husband's criticism, but at the moment she didn't feel like parting from her daughter. Sheniera was the only one who could make Mora forget the weight of her duty as the leader of the temples.

After ten years had passed since they had gotten married, Mora had finally given up and resigned herself to the fact that it may have been impossible for her to have children anymore. So to finally receive Sheniera was a treasure. She was in good health, she wasn't developing slowly, and she was growing up healthily.

Her daughter was full of life; someone without children probably couldn't understand just how much that simple fact encouraged Mora and gave her the strength to fight.

Gunner was a good husband. He didn't have any special power, and both his intelligence and courage were ordinary. However, he was an honest person who displayed a lot of tender affection. He protected their house in Mora's place and on occasion even assisted her with her duty as leader of the temples. If he weren't with her there was probably no way she could tolerate her exhausting work.

"Mother, swing me more, swing me more."

Mora swung her daughter in a large circle and Sheniera released a high-pitched scream in joy. At that moment the approaching battle with The Majin completely vanished from her mind.

There was only one thing that was irreplaceable to Mora. It wasn't her position or her power. It was her love for her daughter and her husband. Other than them, there was nothing important to her.

That was three years ago, during the days when the world was still at peace.

#

In front of the small temple that controlled the Illusion Fog Barrier, Adlet Maia was at a loss for words. His companions were no different, once again silent and unable to speak. They were all staring at the girl in front of them by the name of Rolonia Manchetta.

"Um, why are there seven people here?"

Unaware of the situation, Rolonia looked around at the companions and craned her neck to the side.

"This can't be happening. I never thought they would come like this," Fremy muttered.

"It's impossible. What does it mean? Why did it increase again?" Mora asked, clutching her head in frustration.

"Uh, umm...What's increased?" Rolonia hesitantly looked to Adlet and Mora's faces. Then the next moment she finally noticed Adlet's injuries.

"Ad-kun, what happened to you? Did you have to fight after all? Wait, I'll heal you."

Rolonia tried to place her hands onto Adlet's body, but Adlet stopped her. This was not the time to receive treatment.

He looked over at his companions. There were a variety of reactions: from some at a loss for words due to shock and others staring at Rolonia with a look of impatience and frustration. So Adlet was unable to figure out who was the seventh just from their faces.

"What do you think everyone?" Adlet asked.

"There's only one way to think about it. We're back where we started," Fremy answered in an irritated tone.

"Are we trapped again? When will we be able to get out of this forest?"

Unable to understand what was going on, Rolonia was completely flustered. She exchanged glances with Adlet and Mora, and then suddenly lowered her head.

"...Um...I'm, I'm sorry!"

"Rolonia, what are you apologizing for?" Mora asked.

"Um...If I hadn't been late...I wouldn't have caused so much trouble for everyone...I'm sorry, I'm so sorry."

Over and over again, Rolonia bowed her head.

She hasn't changed at all, Adlet thought as he looked at her.

"This isn't your fault. Probably. Lift up your head," Adlet said and still shrunken in fear Rolonia looked around at the others.

"Well then, who is this person, meow?" Hans asked.

However, instead of Rolonia, Mora replied. "She's exactly who she said she was earlier. This is Rolonia Manchetta, The Saint of Fresh Blood. She lived at the head temple with me for two and a half years. And though she doesn't look reliable, her abilities are unquestioned."

"Tha...thank you very much," Rolonia said, honestly grateful for the praise.

"She seems weak," Hans said while scratching his head.

"Her abilities are unquestioned? That's unlikely. Rolonia was infamous for being a dimwitted fool," Chamo said, making Rolonia shrink down into herself even more.

"Whether she's strong or not isn't important. The issue is if she is an enemy or an ally." Fremy's finger was already on her rifle's trigger. And looking at her eye, it seemed like she was staring at an enemy.

"Um...I'm...I'm sorry. I was at fault and I regret it. So please, please forgive me."

Rolonia continued to bow her head profusely. Sighing, Adlet spoke to his agitated companions, who seemed ready to murder her.

"...For now, let's all introduce ourselves!"

Adlet and the others each introduced themselves to Rolonia and showed her their crests.

Adlet, Mora, and Chamo were already acquainted with Rolonia. And though Goldof and Rolonia had never met before, they both seemed to know each other's names. Fremy, however, didn't talk about how she was the daughter of a

Kyoma or the Six Flower killer, she just stated her name and that she was the Saint of Gunpowder. And Hans called himself an assassin, which shocked Rolonia a lot.

After hearing everyone's names and seeing their crests, Rolonia finally grasped their predicament.

"There are seven heroes? What does this mean?"

Astounded, Fremy asked. "Are you really saying you can't understand if we don't explain it?"

"...Sorry."

"One of us is an impostor. And I'm thinking that person must be you," Fremy stated, her intent to kill Rolonia emanating from her body.

In response, Rolonia shrieked like a small animal and shrank away. However, Adlet stepped in between the two of them before things could escalate.

"Wait Fremy. That hasn't been determined yet."

"Sure it hasn't been determined, but I can't think of any other possibility. If she is not the seventh then who is she?"

Adlet hesitated and as he protected Rolonia, he recalled the fight with Nashetania.

It was unlikely that it was Fremy. If she hadn't been there, Adlet would be dead. And both Hans and Chamo were also unlikely since they had chased after Nashetania. Though it was true Mora incited the others to kill him, it was hard to imagine that she hadn't been tricked by Nashetania as well. And though Goldof was Nashetania's subordinate and it was expected that he would be suspicious, as far as Adlet could tell from the situation, it seemed like he too had been deceived by her.

"There isn't anyone else who could be the seventh," Fremy declared and Hans and Chamo seemed to agree

"Wait, something doesn't make sense. If Rolonia is the seventh then why didn't she come with Nashetania? What's the point in making Nashetania come alone?"

"Nashetania...it can't be, did something happen with the princess-sama?" Rolonia asked.

Unfortunately they weren't able to explain.

"Maybe they had actually planned to come together, meow. Maybe there was some situation that prevented them from meeting up."

"What kind of situation?"

"I don't know anything about enemy matters." Hans smiled and shrugged.

"...Adlet, stand aside. You're in danger." Fremy aimed her gun at Rolonia. However, Adlet shielded Rolonia with his back.

"Fremy lower your gun. Rolonia is not the seventh," Mora said, causing Fremy to look over in her direction. "I said it before, but I was at the Head Temple for a long time with Rolonia. She is a person who couldn't deceive anyone."

"Didn't you think Nashetania was the same kind of person?"

"Rolonia hasn't displayed any suspicious behavior at all. It's unlikely she had contact with the Kyoma or their underlings."

Mora stepped forward and placed her body in front of Fremy's muzzle. It was as if she were saying, "If you're going to shoot, then shoot."

"Meow. Don't you understand Mora's position? She is the next most suspicious person after Rolonia." Mora winced at Hans' words.

"My being suspected can't be helped. But Rolonia is absolutely genuine."

As Adlet ground his teeth he continued to shield Rolonia with his back. "Enough already. Isn't this just a repeat of the situation before?"

"There is an enemy among us. Until we find them we can't move forward," Fremy replied and the two of them glared at one another.

Then Chamo turned away and looked off in another direction. "Someone's coming."

From the direction of the continent they could hear the sounds of horse hooves. A group of cavalry clad in magnificent black armor were rushing towards the temple.

"I wonder if they're enemies." Fremy pointed her rifle in their direction.

"No, that's Gwinvale's king, meow," Hans replied. Gwinvale was the country bordering the Wailing Demon Territory.

"Rolonia-dono!⁵ Grave news! Are the Heroes of the Six Flowers still there?!" Shouted an elderly man at the head of the group. Perhaps he was the king of Gwinvale and the man behind the Illusion Fog Barrier. Gwinvale's king and a group of knights soon arrived in front of the temple. They then dismounted, took off their helmets and respectfully bowed.

⁵ Dono can be thought of as a polite honorific similar to “-sama”/master/milord. It is only used in written Japanese nowadays.

"I am the king of Gwinvale, Dolton the third. And also present are the royal guard. We heard about the unusual event with the Illusion Fog Barrier and it is our intention to devote all of our energy to helping you." ⁶

The man preserved his majestic demeanor without dropping decorum. *Surely he was a dignified ruler*, Adlet thought.

As the representative of the seven, Mora dealt with the king and his guards. "I am one of the Heroes of the Six Flowers, Mora Chester, the Saint of Mountains. We'd be greatly obliged to receive the king's assistance. Incidentally, did something serious occur?"

"I came to report that the Kyoma scattered about my kingdom are assembling their forces and facing this forest. I fear it seems like they will come here to attack in several hours."

At the king's declaration, a wave of tension rushed through the heroes. They didn't know how many Kyoma were in the continent, but it shouldn't be less than 2,000 at a minimum. And if that force came to attack them it was possible that they would all be wiped out.

We had been careless, Adlet thought as he gritted his teeth. Originally The Illusion Fog Barrier was meant to trap the Kyoma in the main continent. But now that the barrier had been dissolved the Kyoma would surge into the Wailing Demon Territory.

⁶ 皆様のため死力を尽くす所存にて

"Maybe it would be better to withdraw temporarily."

"Running is no good. Chamo isn't afraid of the seventh or whatever," Chamo retorted to Fremy.

"But, but...we don't know who the enemy is. So if we fight the Kyoma..."

"Rolonia, it's just like Chamo said. We are not able to retreat," Mora said, admonishing the frightened Rolonia.

"If I had to say, it seems more fun to advance this way, meow."

"What do you mean by fun?" Mora asked.

"Isn't it more fun when there's a lot of danger?" Hans asked with a broad grin.

The king of Gwinvale and his subordinates stared in bewilderment as the heroes batted ideas back and forth. They too were perplexed by the existence of the seventh.

"It's dangerous to continue. The seventh is without a doubt preparing their next trap."

The seven continued their debate without paying any attention to the king of Gwinvale and his subordinates.

"What should we do, meow? Perhaps retreating may be more dangerous, meow."

"What do you mean?"

"Maybe Rolonia anticipated that we would retreat and is luring us into a trap, meow? However, that would be more fun for me, meow."

Mora interjected into Hans and Fremy's argument. "I said earlier that Rolonia absolutely isn't the enemy."

"Be quiet Mora. We really can't trust you either."

"Wait a minute. Chamo can't trust *Fremy* either. She is a Kyoma after all." Chamo's outing of Fremy's identity seemed to make her slightly angry.

"Enough already!" Adlet shouted. "Arguing will get us nowhere!"

Everyone's eyes went to Adlet. "No one trusts anyone, so no matter what we talk about we probably won't be able to settle anything."

"...Well then, what should we do Adlet?"

"I will decide everything. And you all will do as I say without any objections."

It was an arrogant proposal and under normal circumstances that statement would invite backlash. But at the moment Adlet thought that was the only thing he could do.

"Right now the only one who can definitively say that they are not the seventh is me. So doing what I say is probably the most logical course of action."

Hans, Chamo, and then Fremy made faces clearly showing their dissatisfaction.

"That may be the most logical, but I'm really uncomfortable with it, meow."

"Have you forgotten? I'm the strongest man in the world. Do you think there are mistakes with the decisions of the world's strongest?"

"I think so."

"Yup."

Fremy and Chamo both replied immediately.

"However, at the moment I think that is the only thing we can do. Just as Adlet said, we won't be able to settle anything like this," Mora said.

As for Rolonia, though she didn't voice an opinion, she seemed to object to the idea.

"Well, I guess it can't be helped. This guy is a fool, but he's not a hopeless one," Hans conceded.

"Put a bit more trust in me. I am the strongest man in the world."

"Meow, yeah, yeah," Hans said, not taking Adlet's statement seriously.

In any case, Adlet had to decide whether to advance or to retreat.

"Mora. I want to ask you something first. Is there someone among the Saints who has the power to find the seventh?"

The person who replied wasn't Mora, but Fremy. "I've heard of Marmanna the Saint of Words. She can see past lies and has the power to make people tell the truth."

Certainly with that power they could figure out who the seventh was. But Mora shook her head.

"That's no good. Marmanna is at the Head Temple. No matter how hard you rush, it would take seven days to get there."

In that case it was no good. Even if they were able to make the round trip in ten days, they would still run out of time to defeat the Majin. Plus there was no guarantee that the person who was the Saint of Words was even safe at the moment.

"I am Adlet Maia, the strongest man in the world. King of Gwinvale, I don't think you understand the circumstances, but I ask that you go along with what I'm going to say. From now, how much time would it take to reactivate the Illusion Fog Barrier?"

"We've prepared food and water so that we could hold this position, so it may be possible to do it soon."

"Well then, please activate the barrier 30 minutes from now. And until we defeat The Majin, I'd like you to keep the barrier up. Can you do that?"

"The barrier is designed to automatically lower when you defeat The Majin. Until then, no matter what happens the barrier won't deactivate."

Adlet nodded and looked at his companions. "We will break into the Wailing Demon Territory. Is that alright with everyone?"

Though Fremy had indicated it would be difficult to proceed, it didn't seem like she would voice an objection to his idea. Rolonia seemed the same way.

"There's a chance the enemy is assembling its military might at the entrance to The Wailing Demon Territory. Don't get careless. Let's go!"

The seven then started to run. Which was when Rolonia drew close to Adlet's side and said, "Ad-kun, grab my shoulder."

"I'm fine. If it's just running, I can do it."

After his response, Rolonia placed her hand on his shoulder. Then her hand started to glow faintly and at the same time Adlet's body began to warm.

"I can treat you while I'm running. I am the Saint of Fresh Blood. Healing wounds is my specialty."

"Got it. Well, I'll leave it to you."

"Ad-kun, what in the world happened? I have absolutely no idea."

Same here, Adlet thought.

The seven rushed into the forest and ran along the coastline. Then they started to smell a faint strange scent coming from the ground, signaling their arrival in the Wailing Demon Territory. And after a while they saw a giant mass of fog appear behind them.

The fog meant that their path of retreat was gone and until they defeated The Majin they wouldn't be able to leave the territory. *But that's good*, Adlet thought. The battle was one they weren't allowed to lose. It was better to reject any ideas of escape.

Chapter One: Part Two

A peninsula extended out from a part of the eastern edge of The Wailing Demon Territory towards the northeast. As for its size, an ordinary person would probably take about five days to cross it on foot. The terrain was extremely complex, and even now the full details weren't clear. The only information that had ever been passed on came from the Saint of the Single Flower's memories and the incomplete maps drawn by past Heroes of the Six Flowers.

Rumors say that it was currently impossible to bring a boat ashore the territory. The entire long coast was surrounded by shallows and if one were to approach, their boat would be attacked by stone blades. The Kyoma had spent a lot of time changing the peninsula into a giant stronghold, so other than approaching by land or flying through the air, there was no way to enter the Wailing Demon Territory.

The intended destination of the Heroes of the Six Flowers was the place where The Majin slept, at the northwest point of the territory. The Saint of the Single Flower had named that area the Home of Spilled Tears.

After The Majin awoke there were about 30 days until its revival could be fully carried out. And if the heroes couldn't manage to reach that point by that time then the world would end.

Half a day had passed since they crossed over into the peninsula. Adlet was leaning on Rolonia's shoulder to help him stand. The wound where Nashetania had stabbed him started to hurt again and he could tell that blood was oozing out of his stomach.

"Ad-kun. I'll treat your stomach. Relax for a bit," Rolonia said, then touched Adlet's stomach. The power of blood Rolonia used amplified the natural healing properties within his blood and soon his bleeding stopped.

The Heroes were in the eastern area of the territory called the Falling Blood Valley. The valley was called "Falling Blood" because when the Saint of the Single Flower fought The Majin before, she had been so fatigued that she had vomited blood in the valley.

They haven't encountered any fights from the forest up until they had set foot in the valley. They didn't see any Kyoma waiting to ambush them along the coast like they had thought, and they managed to reach the valley far quicker than they had imagined.

The seven were on guard and cautiously advanced through the complicated terrain of the valley stretching out in front of them. Although they were prepared for an attack from the Kyoma from the outside, the companions were also searching for any indication of betrayal or a trap within the valley. And so they walked slowly.

The valley was eerily quiet. Fremy sniped down several Kyoma that seemed to be on the lookout, but other than those they haven't seen any enemies since. Fremy and Mora had gone ahead to scout the current situation, and the remaining five were waiting for their return.

"Are you alright Rolonia? You're completely pale."

"...I'm..al...al...alright."

A while ago while they were progressing through the territory Adlet had told Rolonia about their battle with Nashetania. For a while Rolonia couldn't believe that she had betrayed them. After that Adlet also told her how Fremy was the daughter of a Kyoma and that she was the Six Flower killer. That was when Rolonia had gone pale. She said she had known Asley the Saint of Ice, one of the Hero candidates killed by Fremy.

"I understand that fighting alongside Fremy is complicated. But for now let it be. We're all companions and I really don't want us to fight among ourselves anymore."

"...Ri, right."

"Adlet." At that moment, Fremy returned.

"Hie!" Rolonia screamed the instant Fremy spoke. But Fremy seemed even more shocked than Rolonia was.

"...What's the matter Rolonia?"

"...Nothing, nothing at all. I'm fine." Rolonia was scared. But it wasn't just of Fremy, she was also afraid of the assassin Hans, the violent Chamo, and

Nashetania's follower. The only people she could speak honestly with were her old friends Adlet and Mora.

One of them was the enemy. And though it was understandable to have fear, to be too afraid was a problem.

"...I can't see any Kyoma. So we're fine at the moment. Since Mora is going ahead, let's follow and meet up with her." After that Fremy turned her back on Adlet and walked away, and the five had to increase their pace to follow after her.

Suddenly a cry echoed above the valley making Rolonia tremble with a start. But when Adlet looked up he only saw a deer crossing the valley.

The Wailing Demon Territory surprisingly had a lot of animals. The poison the Majin emitted didn't affect any living creatures other than humans, meaning that other than to eat, even the Kyoma didn't attack the animals.

"It's a deer. Ah, it's cute. Though Chamo's pets are cuter." Chamo smiled, but the only one shocked was Rolonia. And her being shocked by a deer made Adlet worry whether she could handle what was ahead of them.

"Hey cow girl. Are you really one of the Six Flowers, despite being so weak?" Chamo asked, idly twirling her foxtail grass in her hands.

"Um, well..."

"Chamo knows. The Goddess of Fate made some kind of mistake selecting a dunce of a Saint. Chamo can't believe you would be chosen as a Flower if that weren't the case."

"Um..." Rolonia just stared down at the ground. "...I've also been thinking that...per...perhaps... I'm not really one of the Flowers."

What are you saying? Adlet thought.

"Chamo thinks you're irritating. So if you're the seventh Chamo wants you to confess right away. If you apologize now, Chamo won't do anything bad to you."

"Hey, cut it out!" Adlet shouted.

"...When the crest appeared I didn't believe I was one of the Flowers. Perhaps selecting me was some kind of mistake..."

"Well that settles it, huh?"

Adlet was about to shout at Chamo when a voice in front of them spoke.

"I think Rolonia is strong." It was Fremy. "I heard Mora was charmed by her ability and gave her special training herself. When Rolonia was at the Head Temple I couldn't make a move against Mora."

"Well, perhaps she's a little strong."

"Tha, thank you very much Fremy-san."

"You don't have to thank me. I'm still suspicious of you."

"...Um..." Rolonia shrunk back a bit.

"More importantly I want to hear more about you. All I know from you is your identity as the Saint of Fresh Blood and that you seem to be a considerably strong person."

"That's right. Talk Rolonia," Adlet urged.

"I became a Saint two and a half years ago. Before that I was working as a servant. Really, I should have quit the position soon, but by Mora-san's command I pursued becoming a Hero of the Six Flowers. And so at the Head Temple Mora-san and Welynn the Saint of Salt instructed me on how to fight."

"...Tell us the details of what happened to you after the Majin woke up until you met up with us."

"Oh, okay. Umm, when the Majin awoke and I received the crest, I was at the Temple of Fire in the kingdom of the Yellow Fruit. Lenelle-san and...ah Lenelle-san the Saint of Fire and I had been studying together."

"And then?"

"Really, I should have arrived much faster, but on the way some Kyoma attacked and there were injured people asking me to treat them. I wondered whether it would be alright if I were late, but I couldn't refuse...And so I was delayed. I'm sorry." Rolonia bowed her head.

"How about when you arrived at the Illusion Fog Barrier?" Adlet asked.

"I arrived at the forest yesterday in the middle of the night. At that time the barrier had already been activated. The king of Gwinvale was at a tower and he was the one who told me about the barrier. He also said that he had been captured by unknown soldiers and had no idea about the current situation or why the barrier had been activated."

"And then morning came, the fog cleared and you met up with us?"

Rolonia nodded in agreement.

"Is there anyone who thinks there is something odd about her story?" Adlet asked.

"Were you really at the Temple of Fire?" Hans asked in response.

"Let's confirm that with Mora later. You don't think there is anything strange about what she said though, right?"

"That's right, meow."

After quietly listening to Rolonia's explanation, Chamo asked, "Hey, why do you know Adlet?"

Rolonia looked at Adlet's way and their eyes met. Then he nodded, giving her a sign that it was okay for her to talk.

"Ad-kun and I met about two years ago. Do you know Atro Spyker-san?"

As Rolonia spoke, Adlet recalled his past.

Back then he hadn't even dreamed that he would see Rolonia again. The first time they had met she didn't seem anything like a girl who could be brought up as a warrior that would end up being selected as one of the Six Flowers.

When Adlet was around ten he became the pupil of Atro Spyker, a man living in isolation deep in the mountains.

And for the next eight years Adlet absorbed all the fighting techniques, knowledge, and methods to create secret weapons that Atro had figured out.

But Adlet wasn't Atro's only pupil. Many young people seeking to be one of the Flowers apprenticed under him. However, none of them could follow Atro's unusual training and ultimately left the mountain, with only Adlet remaining.

Other than pupils, Atro had also received requests from each country's elites, renowned mercenaries, and Saints to teach them his fighting skills. They appeared bearing letters of introductions from noblemen and mercenary leaders, and they apprenticed under Atro for a short time, acquiring new battle skills and knowledge. Though Atro lived his life as a hermit, by no means did that mean he had severed his ties to the world.

It was perhaps a little over two years ago when Rolonia Manchester visited Atro's home, holding one of those letters of introduction. She wasn't any different than how she was now. No, now she was even more timid.

"Adlet."

Deep in the mountains, Adlet was focusing solely on his dart throwing when Atro suddenly spoke to him. But Adlet continued his training; it didn't matter if his master were standing beside him or not. With ruptured blisters, torn flesh, and blood dripping down his fingers, he threw the darts.

"This girl is Rolonia Manchester. She is the Saint of Fresh Blood. For the next two months I will be teaching her about the Kyoma's way of life and how to deal with them. Don't bother her."

As Atro spoke he pointed to a girl standing nearby. But Adlet didn't greet her nor reply. His personality at that time was different than it was now. He had been far more bitter and starved for vengeance. He cursed everything in the world and more than anything he hated his own weakness.

"Just say your name," Atro said.

While hiding in Atro's shadow, Rolonia looked at Adlet with a fearful gaze.

"I'm Adlet Maia. Eventually I will be the strongest man in the world, but right now I'm not. Don't talk to me."

"Su...sure. I'm sorry."

"Move Rolonia," Atro said just as Adlet moved.

He threw a dart at Atro and at the same time drew a knife and slashed at him. To the side Rolonia screamed and sank down to the ground. Atro deflected the dart with a single finger, grabbed Adlet's wrist and threw him down. But without a moment's rest, the fallen Adlet swung his knife at Atro's ankles.

Yet just before the blade made contact, Atro moved out of the way and kicked Adlet in the face, causing blood to rush out his nose.

"Are...are you alright Adlet-san?"

"Didn't I say not to talk to me?"

Adlet then tried to stand, but his legs got tangled under himself, preventing him from getting up.

"Don't worry Saint of Fresh Blood. He'll be gone shortly."

"...Ah, umm..."

"I gave him instructions. He can use whatever tactic he wants, it doesn't matter. But if he can't kill me by the time he's 16 then he'll be kicked out from this place. He's got one month left."

"...Ugh..."

Atro kicked Adlet in the face and said, "Laugh."

Adlet tried to move his lips, but he could no longer smile. Hunger, a sense of powerlessness, and despair had even stolen his smile from him.

Atro faced the fallen Adlet and spat at him.

"Garbage."

Atro then left Adlet on the ground, taking Rolonia with him. And then Adlet pounded his fists to the ground and screamed.

#

Rolonia stayed at a cottage Atro built for visiting guests to use. It was a place where one could seemingly live alone in the mountains. Atro and Adlet on the other hand lived in a cave like beasts. Atro was constantly at Rolonia's side, teaching her about what he knew regarding the Kyoma, eating with her, and taking personal care of her. And during those times Adlet didn't interfere.

It seemed like every day Adlet challenged Atro at some point and then lost. And though he was injured each time, through sheer will he forced himself through the pain and stood back up.

He understood that Atro would not go soft on him. So if he could not defeat him in one month he really would be kicked out.

On top of that, Adlet still hadn't learned everything from Atro. And if he were forced to leave, the path to becoming a Hero of the Six Flowers would be closed to him.

A single Kyoma clung to Adlet's mind. The Kyoma with three wings sprouting out from its back and walked on two legs. The Kyoma with the narrow lizard face and had appeared with a gentle smile. The Kyoma who destroyed his village and stole his sister and best friend. He couldn't forget about him for even a moment.

The only thing ruling Adlet's mind was hatred. He couldn't even live as long as he couldn't kill that Kyoma or watch it die.

Rolonia's existence didn't even occupy a corner of his heart.

Then one night, like always Adlet was beaten by Atro and was sleeping in the cave like a log. He felt something touch his back and jumped up just to see Rolonia sitting beside him holding a lamp.

"What did you come here for?!" Adlet yelled, causing Rolonia to flee to the corner of the cave, trembling.

"A, A, A, Master Atro told me to treat you..."

"Atro did?"

"I'm...the Saint of Fresh Blood...So I can heal people's injuries."

"...Please." Adlet said as he lay down on the ground.

Rolonia then offered a prayer to the God of Fresh Blood and borrowed their power. And when she placed her hands to Adlet's wounds they closed up in a blink of an eye.

"Human blood contains the power to naturally heal wounds. By amplifying that power I can heal injuries like this."

"The powers of the Saints are incredible," Adlet said.

Rolonia's cheeks reddened happily, just a bit.

"...Are you trying to become a Hero of the Six Flowers?" Adlet asked.

"Huh?"

"Do I even have to ask? That is the objective of all warriors."

To his claim Rolonia shook her head. "Um, this might seem strange, but..."

"What is it?"

"I'm thinking of going back down the mountain."

"Did something happen with Atro?"

"No, that's not it. Umm, I've been thinking I should give up on trying to become one of the Flowers. In fact, I think it would be better if I quit being a Saint too."

Adlet was shocked. He had lived his life until now in order to get stronger. In order to gain power he had thrown away everything. To let go of the power he'd gained was something he couldn't even think about.

"But...but I can't become a Hero of the Six Flowers. And if by some mistake I was chosen, it would cause trouble for everyone. So wouldn't it be better for the Saint of Fresh Blood to quit..."

"Why are you here? Don't you want to get strong?"

"Umm well..."

"Explain!" Adlet's voice was full of anger.

Nervously, Rolonia tried to explain.

In the beginning, Rolonia wasn't an acolyte seeking to become a Saint. Actually, she was a servant at the Temple of Fresh Blood who washed the clothes of the acolytes.

Five months ago the previous Saint of Fresh Blood retired, and a ceremony was held to select the new Saint. But the person chosen wasn't one of the acolytes that attended the ceremony, but Rolonia who was drying laundry in the garden.

"Is such a thing possible?" Adlet had asked her while she recounted her story.

"The Saint is chosen by the gods...and nobody knows what the gods are thinking."

Rolonia soon tried to quit being a Saint. The previous Saint and acolytes thought that was to be expected. However, she was then ordered by the Head of the Temples who supervised the Saints. So Rolonia continued to be the Saint of Fresh Blood. And with the goal of becoming one of the Six Flowers, she underwent battle training. She moved to the Head Temple and there she received intensive training in order to become a great Saint.

"The Temple Head said I would become an extremely powerful Saint, but that is impossible...and no matter how many years I train, it'll just be a big nuisance when she realizes that I've remained the same weak girl I've always been."

As Adlet listened to Rolonia, hatred bubbled out from his heart.

"...I...I wish I had been born female...If I had been born a girl then I could become a Saint."

"Huh?"

"If I became a Saint, I would get stronger. I would acquire the power to kill him. But I was born a boy." Adlet smashed his fist into the ground. "Stop screwing around!"

"Ah, uhh..."

"Why did someone like you receive power? Why not me? Why was it you?" Adlet grabbed Rolonia by the collar and shook her. "I want power. I want power! I want the power to kill him! I don't care what I have to exchange to get it, I just want the power to kill him."

Every day as he threw up blood, he realized the reality that he didn't have power. And every night as he cursed his own weakness and slept like a log, he repeated over and over again within his heart, I want power, I want power.

And now Rolonia was trying to throw away something which Adlet could never receive, no matter how much he wished for it. And that was something he could not forgive.

"Hand over the power! Give it to me!"

"...I...I can't. It is an extremely difficult skill to give power to another person. "

"Shut up! Give it to me! Give me that power!"

"I can't! It would be impossible for even the Head of the Temples, or even Leura-sama. Someone like me couldn't..."

"Why can't you do it!? Give it to me! Someone give me power! I just want to become strong!"

Adlet released Rolonia, threw himself flat down onto the ground and started to cry.

"...I'm...I'm sorry. I didn't mean..."

Even Rolonia started to cry beside the sobbing Adlet.

In the cave the two of them continued to cry throughout the night; the girl who had received power and the boy who couldn't.

Around dawn Adlet apologized to Rolonia. He wasn't the only person in pain, but it was an obvious truth which he had forgotten for a long time.

Rolonia also apologized to Adlet. She had said some cruel things without understanding how Adlet felt.

And after that the two of them became friends. For just two months they only had an ephemeral relationship. It was a relationship that should have been forgotten as time passed. However, Rolonia was one of the few friends Adlet had been able to make.

"...And that's what happened."

Rolonia omitted a large amount of Adlet's past and in his heart, Adlet thanked Rolonia. He felt both ashamed and depressed when he thought back to that time.

"Wasn't Mora the person who made you apprentice under Atro? I didn't know she knew Atro," Adlet said.

"It doesn't seem like they knew one another. Atro was just very famous."

Something seems strange about that. I wonder if there is a connection between them, Adlet thought.

"Meohihihi, it seems like you two got awfully close in two months, meow. Adlet, you didn't pretend to be an unsociable person then have sex with her?"

"Shut up!" Adlet pushed Hans away, while Fremy watched the two of them with a cold stare. It was at that moment that Mora returned.

"What's up, Mora?"

"I couldn't see any Kyoma. The valley is completely deserted."

Adlet didn't entertain any doubts about her words. It was clear that there were no Kyoma in the valley. Adlet wasn't aware of anything hidden beneath her words.

#

About ten minutes prior to her return, Mora surveyed her surroundings while walking through the valley. Though it was true that a lot of Kyoma couldn't lurk in the valley's complicated terrain, the area was ideal for ambushes. So Mora watched her back and the sky above her as she advanced.

At that moment Mora saw a single Kyoma atop a cliff. It was a relatively small one, in the shape of a monkey.

But the moment Mora made a fist and prepared to attack, the Kyomathrew its body across the air and landed directly in front of her. Then it lowered its head in submission and started to approach her on all fours.

"What the...?" Mora muttered as she looked down at the Kyoma's back. Characters had been written in black ink on its flesh

[This is a warning, Mora. You are out of time.]

For a while Mora just stared at the monkey Kyoma, bowing in submission to her. Then Mora resolutely stomped on the Kyoma's back. It died with a single strike. It had been a low level Kyoma and was completely inconsequential.

But Mora stomped on the Kyoma's back again and again until she could no longer read the characters that had been written there.

"You are out of time...that must mean...," Mora muttered.

Then leaving the single Kyoma corpse, Mora left the area.

#

"You didn't encounter a single Kyoma?....That is actually scary," Adlet said.

"The seventh hasn't done anything. That's kind of a let-down," Chamo replied.

That was exactly right. Adlet had thought that the next trap would be waiting for them as soon as they entered the Wailing Demon Territory, or that the seventh might seize the opportunity and come to attack them. But the current situation was too peaceful.

"Maybe it's not that they haven't come to do anything, but that they couldn't do anything, meow." Hans suggested.

"What do you mean?"

"Well since we entered the territory, Fremy has been staring at us like she wants to kill us. She intends to immediately shoot us dead if we do something even a little bit strange."

Adlet looked over at Fremy, but she didn't deny Hans' claim.

"I've been afraid for a while now. She's a frightening woman." Then as if enjoying himself, Hans laughed.

"Mora, what's up ahead?"

"About fifteen minutes ahead you can see a knoll.¹ There is a mountain beyond that. Without a doubt, it looks like the mountain called, 'The Eternal Flower'"

After hearing that Adlet checked his mental map of the area. It seemed like they weren't lost and were advancing precisely along the route they had planned out.

If Adlet's mental map were correct, then in the mountain was a relic left behind by the Saint of the Single Flower. The region called The Eternal Flower was a valuable safe zone. At noon they would rest there for a moment, then they intended to continue deeper into the territory.

"I have a suggestion. After we get out of the open, let's rest," Fremy said.

"It's still not necessary. I'd like to continue to the mountain...to The Eternal Flower, while it's still early." But as soon as Adlet said that, Fremy shook her head.

"I have something I want to talk to you about. As soon as possible. It will be a long conversation and it's serious, so I want us to settle down and talk it through thoroughly."

"About what?"

¹ a small, rounded hill

"About the inner workings of the Kyoma," Fremy said, causing everyone to tense up.

"Surely she wants to talk about the three Kyoma leaders that command all the Kyoma," Mora said.

She had forgotten about the fight with Nashetania or Rolonia's appearance. As Fremy said, talking about the Kyoma leaders was of the utmost importance.

"Wouldn't it be good to talk at The Eternal Flower? It's not so far from the knoll."

"If I were the enemy I would position my military force around that area. It doesn't look like we will be able to talk freely there," Fremy said.

"That might be so. And since there is no indication that they will launch an ambush in an open area, let's hear you out at the Knoll."

"If that is the plan, then let's go quickly."

Hans walked first, followed by Chamo and Mora. Then Goldof came after them with a powerless gait.

But when Adlet started to walk, Fremy grabbed his sleeve.

"What's wrong?"

"...Do you feel it?"

"What?"

"He's here. The Kyoma," Fremy said and looked up to the sky.

At that moment the silhouette of the Kyoma he would never forget appeared in his mind.

The Kyoma that destroyed his hometown while talking gently to the villagers and showing a bewitching smile. The Kyoma that had taken his sister, his best friend, and everything from him.

Adlet's heart was racing and a rush of tension ran up his back. It wasn't that he felt death in the air, nor that he sensed danger. Nevertheless sweat started to appear on his forehead. He couldn't explain the feeling with reason, but whatever it was it got him extremely worked up.

"I sense his presence. I don't know where it is, but he is surely here. I would never forget it. The feeling of that existence coils about my skin."

Adlet recalled what Fremy had talked about the night before yesterday. She talked about the one who had ordered other Kyoma to hurt her in the past. One of the three leaders of the Kyoma and the same Kyoma that had destroyed Adlet's hometown.

Adlet's soul was telling him that the one he was sensing was that Kyoma.

"Let's go. I said earlier that this would be a long conversation."

"Can I ask you one thing for now? What is that Kyoma's name?"

Fremy looked up to the sky and answered quietly, "Tgurneu..."²

² The Japanese pronounces the name Te-gu-ne-u

Chapter One: Part Three

"Hey, what do you think is the strongest power that exists in this world?" Someone whispered at about the same time Adlet heard Tgurneu's name. "If you completely, completely, completely think it through you'll realize that it's love after all," said a Kyoma.

The Kyoma had two arms and two legs, and its height was a little over two meters. Comparatively, it could probably be classified as a small Kyoma.

The green scales and color of its trunk were made of a mottled pattern. Its arms and legs had white feathers on them. However, on just its palms it had the damp skin of an amphibian. It also had three giant bird wings extending from its back. But strangely, between two black wings was a single white, swan-like one. And in its chest it had a large amphibian-like mouth.

The Kyoma's strange figure was like a disorderly jumble of various animals. And its head was extremely long and narrow, resembling a lizard.

At the moment the Kyoma was sitting on a small wooden chair.

"...I really don't get it."

"I see."

The Kyoma was holding a single book in its hand. It was a plain book, cloth-bound and decorated with golden thread. Inside was a collection of scripts written by well-known drama playwrights. With its finger, the Kyoma turned the page.

"Oh Prince Veezell! I've been cursed by you! Oh the beauty and blueness of your eyes! Both the mother and father that gave you those eyes and my own self who appears reflected in those eyes have been cursed."

The Kyoma was reading the script of a play where in order to poison the king of an enemy kingdom, a secret agent had to sneak in to the kingdom but in the process fell in love with that kingdom's prince.

"Why do you think the protagonist shouted this, when a little while ago her mouth had been speaking about love? I know it's nothing more than a listing of words, but it has presented me with an eternal mystery. The power of love is truly frightening."

"...With all due respect, you should stop playing around. The Heroes of the Six Flowers are drawing closer."

"Hahaha, that is right. We should part from the illusions of love for the time being and face the love of reality."

The Kyoma set down the book then picked up a big fig from on the table.

"Before, The Majin lost due to the love of the Saint of the Single Flower."

The Kyoma bit the fig, chewed it, and then swallowed.

"We have lost to the Heroes of the Six Flowers twice. Both times their power had been supported by love. But the third battle will be different from before."

The Kyoma stood.

"This time love will be the cause of their defeat."

Looking up, the Kyoma...Tgurneu laughed silently.

#

15 minutes later Adlet and the others managed to reach the summit of the knoll.

As Mora had said, there was no indication that they would be ambushed there. And even if an enemy appeared, the heroes would be able to prepare for any ambushes while they were climbing up the knoll. But from their position they saw no signs of any Kyoma in the surrounding valley or the sky.

Exhaling in relief, Adlet lowered the iron box from his back. He then took off his leather armor and looked at his wound. With Mora's medicine and Rolonia's treatment, the wound was nearly closed up. It would probably be completely healed by nightfall.

"What, you're exhausted even though you haven't done anything, meow?" Hans asked.

Adlet agreed with Hans' sentiment. He wasn't just being cautious about a surprise attack; various other concerns also weighed down on his mind.

The Kyoma that still haven't shown themselves.

The existence of the seventh whom they couldn't determine.

And those weren't the only things.

Fremy looked like she was about to kill someone.

He didn't know when Chamo might become violent.

And Rolonia was always confused and frightened.

There were many elements about his companions that made him uneasy. But above all, his biggest concern was the knight.

"...Are you alright, Goldof?" Adlet asked, but Goldof simply sat down without answering at all. His eyes looked vacant, his lips had been drawn tight, and his expression was blank.

Ever since Rolonia's appearance and their advance through the Wailing Demon Territory, he hasn't spoken a single word. He only looked up to the sky as if his heart weren't in him.

It was understandable. On top of being betrayed and sneered at by the princess he loved, he had been abandoned. It was a feeling Adlet sympathized with all too well. And so since not even a day had passed, if they told him to pull himself together it would likely be impossible.

Though he was celebrated as a prodigy of the knights, he was still sixteen.

"Goldof, it might be asking too much, but try to put her behind you," Adlet said to Goldof, but he didn't respond. It was as if his voice didn't even reach his ears.

"You'll quickly forget about that kind of woman, meow. You have good looks so women will come to you even if you say nothing."

Goldof didn't say a word back to Hans.

"Have you been in love with Nashetania all this time?"

"Well apart from what she's like on the inside, she does have a nice face, meow. And as far as I could see, she also had considerable breasts."

"...That's not the point." Adlet sighed. Then silently he took out a dart from a pouch on his waist and without making a sound he threw it at Goldof's face.

Without looking up or seeing the dart at all, Goldof caught the projectile with two fingers, and then threw it back to Adlet.

"Even though his heart is broken, it doesn't seem like he has lost his fighting ability. He's quite the warrior," Adlet said with a smile, but Goldof's face remained completely blank.

Mora then beckoned Adlet over with her hand and Adlet walked over to hear what she had to say.

"Adlet, I fear that the seventh might be Goldof. Shouldn't we take some kind of measures against him?"

"...I think he is suspicious, but his being the seventh hasn't been confirmed."

"I no longer think it can be anyone except for him. It's not me. It's not Rolonia. It's not you. Hans and Chamo both took down Nashetania so it's not them either. And if Fremy were the seventh then she would have no reason to help you. So it can't be anyone but Goldof."

"Mora, stop," Adlet said in a quiet but firm voice. "The most frightening thing right now is not the existence of the seventh. It's the framing of one of our innocent companions. Aren't you just speculating?"

"But..."

"Is now alright? I want to talk," Fremy said, interrupting Mora and Adlet's conversation.

"Don't worry, I'll find the seventh. Just relax and wait. I am the strongest man in the world," Adlet said to Mora, and then smiled.

"I still feel uneasy...but I understand. I've decided to trust you."

"Good. Then be quiet and follow me."

The companions sat in a circle around Fremy, keeping their weapons in their hands so that they were prepared for an ambush at any moment.

It would probably be the first time in history that information about the inner workings of the Kyoma would be heard by humans. For a long time no one knew about this information, not to mention the fact that no one was even able to find out about it.

So perhaps Fremy's existence was the Heroes of the Six Flowers' greatest advantage. Knowing about the enemy could largely change the tide of their battle.

"I've said it multiple times, but the Kyoma are commanded by three Kyoma leaders. Their names are Cargikk, Tgurneu, and Dozzu," Fremy said quietly. Her words were concise and straightforward.

"70% of the Kyoma belong to the lower order of creatures that only have the intelligence of animals. Even the remaining 30%, though they have intelligence, don't possess complex emotions. Other than killing humans they are unable to think about anything else.

"But those three Kyoma are different. They have their own will, emotions, philosophy, and a sense of beauty. They also have sufficient power to command the Kyoma. Excluding me, all the Kyoma have unconditionally pledged their loyalty to these three. And with just an order their loyalty would compel them to easily throw away even their lives."

"How strong are they?"

"I don't know exactly. But I believe it's better if we think that those three are people who we'll have no chance of defeating one on one."

The three were opponents that they could never win against one on one. The Heroes now knew just how unfavorable a situation they were in.

"But if we can defeat those three, it will be the same as us defeating the Kyoma. None of the other Kyoma are capable of leading the Kyoma. And if the Kyoma lose their chain of command they would become a disorderly mob. So then we would be able to freely choose whether to crush each one of them or just ignore them and proceed to the Home of Fallen Tears."

"I see."

"But this is the important point. Far from not just getting along, it's safe to say that those three fiercely oppose one another."

It was an astonishing information, but Fremy continued to speak without giving them any time to indicate if they were following what she was saying.

"Of the three, the strongest seems to be Cargikk. He is a Kyoma in the form of a lion who can breathe fire hot enough to incinerate humans. In addition, the smoke given off by his flame is extremely poisonous. He is a terrifying enemy."

"Who is stronger, Chamo or him?"

"I don't know. But the fact that I'm no match for either of you hasn't changed."

"Anyway, Cargikk commands about 60% of the Kyoma. Half of them have assembled in the vicinity around where the Majin sleeps in, The Home of Fallen Tears, and are positioned to intercept any attacks."

I fear Cargikk will not move from that place and I believe he intends to devote all of his energy in completely guarding that place."

"That's the most troublesome type of enemy," Adlet said. It was a simple strategy, but the most effective since from the militarily weaker Heroes' standpoint, it would be best to separate the enemy's forces.

"Next is...Tgurneu. It's a bit difficult to talk about him." Up until then Fremy had been speaking indifferently, but now she was unexpectedly hesitating. And the moment Adlet heard that name his heart once again started to race.

"Until just a little over half a year ago, Tgurneu was the most important person in the world to me."

"And now?" Mora asked.

"...Now he is the person I despise the most. Back to what I was saying, Tgurneu commands about 40% of the Kyoma. He was the mastermind behind my creation and he was the Kyoma who ordered me to be the Six Flower Killer."

There were some points that she'd brought up that Adlet was intrigued by, but for now he didn't say anything and left the talking to Fremy.

"Tgurneu is a Kyoma composed of a mixture of parts. He possesses the power to arrange his body from the parts of countless Kyoma's.

As for his fighting abilities, simply speaking he has the overwhelming physical strength, speed, and durability to crush his enemies. I think it's safe to assume that there isn't anything that can't be destroyed by his hands. But far more terrifying than that is his ingenuity."

"His ingenuity?"

"Creating me was nothing more than a part of his plan. And though I honestly don't know the full details of what he had intended, I do believe Tgurneu was the one who sent Nashetania and the seventh, who is with us now, into our ranks."

"That the princess of the whole country could fall into a Kyoma's clutches...I still can't believe it," Mora muttered.

"That is quite possible. Long before I was born, Tgurneu had extended his hands into the human world. He used shape-shifting Kyoma, Kyoma skilled in espionage, and Kyoma that utilized hypnotism to gather information, and from those he laid out his plan. I don't know how far his reach has extended across the world, but he calmly gathered information that's difficult to acquire without having to personally come to the center of the kingdom."

"..."

"I was made and raised by Tgurneu. Under his instruction I got stronger and continued to kill Six Flower candidates. I deeply respected Tgurneu, and at times I even feared him.

He seemed very warm, and at times he also let me feel his coldness. It was a coldness that I didn't know the depths of, a coldness I couldn't understand."

Adlet noticed that there was still an air of respect within Fremy's words.¹

"No, he was someone I couldn't understand," she quickly corrected herself.

#

"Oh dear," Tgurneu muttered somewhere. It was at the exact time that Fremy was talking about him.

"You thought that way about me Fremy? It's a bit sad that you say you can't understand me." Tgurneu then chuckled. "Even after I had loved you so."

#

Fremy continued her story.

"Cargikk and Tgurneu oppose one another. And all the Kyoma that obey them are primarily split into two groups. If Tgurneu's faction of Kyoma and Cargikk's Kyoma were to meet they wouldn't speak to one another. And even the lower order of

¹ The Japanese reads that Fremy had used Honorific Language to speak about Tgurneu, but there is no real way to convey this nuance of the Japanese language without twisting the English.

Kyoma who couldn't speak would bare their teeth and would threaten the others."

"Why?"

"There are many reasons. Tgurneu places a great deal of importance on tactics so his way of thinking is at odds with Cargikk who tries to attack things head on. But the biggest reason is how they interact with humans.

"Tgurneu believes that humans are tools he can use to achieve his ends. But Cargikk fiercely despises humans and has a deep disdain for them. He even considers associating with humans to be dirty.

"It seems like they came within a step of killing one another when Tgurneu had devised the plan to have me born. Cargikk had believed that the proud blood of Kyoma must not mix with the blood of humans,"

"Could you wait a minute?" Rolonia, who had been silently listening to Fremy until that point, raised her hand. "Umm, didn't you say there were three leaders that commanded the Kyoma?"

Adlet had also been curious about that. Fremy had completely not talked about the other Kyoma. And if Cargikk commanded 60% of the Kyoma and Tgurneu the other 40%, he wondered what the third was doing.

"I don't really know anything about the third...Dozzu. Other than the fact that he exists, I have heard nothing about him."

"What kind of person is he?"

"Dozzu is a traitor. It is said that he possesses a power on par with Tgurneu and Cargikk. But I heard that two hundred years ago he betrayed The Majin and disappeared from The Wailing Demon Territory. I have absolutely no idea what he is doing now. Tgurneu may know, but he never told me."

"Is he our enemy or an ally?"

"I don't know that either. It seems like there are some Kyoma within Tgurneu's faction and Cargikk's faction who have secretly pledged their loyalty to Dozzu. But I only know of two Kyoma that were purged after being suspected of that."

"...Meow, meow. Things like factions and purges are dirty affairs meow," Hans grumbled.

"Fremy, if you saw them could you tell whether or not a Kyoma belongs to Tgurneu's side or Cargikk's side?" Adlet asked.

"To an extent. I think that the Kyoma we encountered at the village where we first met were on Cargikk's side. However, the Kyoma that tricked you within the

Illusion Fog Barrier and the one that ate The Saint of the Sun Leura were on Tgurneu's side."

"So the Princess was being used by Tgurneu after all," Mora said.

"There is a high possibility that is the case."

And with that they had completed the first part of their conversation.

"But isn't the problem how we should attack their positions? And in particular shouldn't we consider Tgurneu to be more dangerous?" Mora was the first to speak.

"Cargikk will defend the Majin, but I think Tgurneu will attack us. What he will do or how he will do it though, I don't know."

"I think it is very unlikely that Tgurneu will attack us himself," Adlet said.

"I agree. If Tgurneu is defeated then 40% of the Kyoma would lose their command structure. I think some would submit themselves to Cargikk's command, but the number would be small. It would be a massive blow for the Kyoma. And it doesn't seem like Tgurneu would risk that chance."

"I have one question. Regarding what would happen if their chain of command is lost, if Tgurneu were to die what exactly would happen to the Kyoma?" Mora asked.

"The Kyoma are mainly connected by some kind of invisible bond. If Tgurneu were to die, instantly all the Kyoma should sense it. It would only take a moment, I think, to cause massive confusion which leads to a state of panic."

"Would you feel it too, Fremy?"

"...Probably," Fremy said as she averted her gaze.

"I see....Hmm, so Tgurneu huh?" Adlet said as he thought about the situation. Mora was curiously interested in Tgurneu, even though unlike him and Fremy she didn't have any personal connection to him.

"He will use the seventh and probably set a trap for us, meow."

The conversation soon moved on to the next topic and Adlet forgot about his minor suspicions.

"Perhaps. The question is what will he do?"

Chamo then raised her hand. "Hey, hey Chamo has come up with something that might be good."

"I don't think it will be, but at any rate," Fremy coldly responded.

But Chamo ignored her. "Without the crest of the Six Flowers a human can't breathe in The Wailing Demon Territory."

It was common knowledge that the crest of the Six Flowers rendered the toxin in the air at the Wailing Demon Territory ineffective to those who possessed it.

"There are six humans here. And all of us can breathe well. So in other words don't we all have genuine crests? And so the seventh is the Kyoma Fremy."

"It wasn't good after all," Fremy said with a sigh. "Even humans who don't have the crest can survive in The Wailing Demon territory. On Tgurneu's side there are Kyoma that spawn special parasites, which if they enter the body they would make humans immune to the toxins in The Wailing Demon Territory."

"Do you have proof of that?"

"At the center of the Wailing Demon territory is a place called the Ear Cropping Plain where there are many human slaves." As she said that, Fremy shot a fleeting look at Adlet. "Tgurneu has gathered human slaves, but for what purpose I don't know. Adlet, the people from your hometown are probably there."

Without thinking, Adlet stood up. Both his hometown that had been destroyed and the people that had been taken away appeared in his mind.

"Those slaves...how are they?"

"I don't know. I've never been there."

"You don't know anything? Anything you could tell me would be fine," Adlet hounded her, but Mora stepped in with a reproachful look on her face.

"I know you are anxious about those people, but we should probably focus on defeating The Majin. Saving those people and returning them to the world of humans will be impossible if we don't defeat The Majin."

She was right, Adlet thought, just as all the fine hairs on his body stood up.

Chamo craned her neck to the side. "Adlet, what happened?"

But without answering Adlet pushed Chamo away. Fremy rolled backwards and stood back up with her rifle drawn. And Hans placed both his hands and his feet on the ground, rounded his back and assumed a cat-like posture.

Then at the place where Chamo had been just a moment ago, the ground massively swelled up then exploded into a cloud of dirt. From that cloud a single Kyoma jumped out.

"Hello," it was a strange, high-pitched and hoarse voice. But the moment he heard it, Adlet's heart, which had calmed down earlier, once again started to pound in his chest.

"What are you talking about? You mustn't go there. I mean, aren't the slaves inconsequential?"

"Tgurneu!" Adlet shouted. His blood boiled and his heart filled with rage. Tgurneu, the being that had stuck in the back of his mind, the one that had caused him so many nightmare..... Right now he was standing right before Adlet's eyes.

"You should be more concerned about me." Tgurneu faced Adlet and spread his arms wide. It was as if he were saying 'come at me'.

Then faster than the eye could see, Adlet drew four darts. He then leaped towards Tgurneu, throwing two pain inducing darts at both of Tgurneu's eyes and two paralysis darts at his elbows.

It will be settled in an instant, Adlet thought. The nightmare I've had for eight years will end in a moment.

However, the four darts didn't work on Tgurneu. He then extended the length of his arm several times and lashed out at Adlet. Since Adlet was still in the air he had no way to evade the attack. He just barely managed to get his sword out and block the blow with it, but the force still sent him flying backwards and crashing into the ground.

"Watch out!"

Mora went to attack Tgurneu from the side. At the same time Hans ran along the ground and aimed for Tgurneu's legs. Fremy shot at Tgurneu's face and from behind Goldof charged at him with his spear held firmly underneath his armpit.

"Take this meow!" Hans shouted.

And as Adlet fell to the ground he watched the battle unfold. One of Tgurneu's arms folded around Mora's armored fist and absorbed the strike. Then he lifted one of his feet, dodged Hans's sword and without a moment's rest, kicked him in the face. He then extended his other arm, which hit Goldof and ended his charge. And with his teeth he caught Fremy's bullet.

"As expected, that was close," Tgurneu's said.

Everyone immediately distanced themselves from Tgurneu. *It can't be*, Adlet thought. He had been able to block the attacks of all four of them at once.

"Did you not anticipate this beforehand? No matter which tactic I use I can kill you all. I can use the seventh to assassinate you, or have the seventh lead you into a trap. Well, at any rate that's the situation you are in."

Tgurneu spread his arms wide, but there was no break in his defenses. Adlet stood back up and readied his sword, but he couldn't move.

"So how do you feel about this situation? Without some kind of strategy or plan you'll be annihilated if you attack me head on." Tgurneu then laughed and rushed towards Adlet.



Chapter Two: Part One

One day three years ago something happened at the head temple. It was the event that led Mora to the moment when she would kill Hans.

#

There was a small annex in the corner of the head temple where Mora, her husband, and their daughter Sheniera lived in a meager nest of love. The building had been well used with an old interior and old style furnishings, which had been appropriated to Mora in the same condition as when the previous temple head had used them. As befitting someone who served the gods, it was a home of simple construction.

Mora was sitting on a sofa in the parlor, holding her face with trembling hands. It was one month after she had begun instructing Nashetania and the others.

"Temple Head...are you listening?"

There were three people in the parlor. One was Mora, and another was her husband, Gunner. However, the one calling to Mora was an elderly woman dressed in a simple white dress.

Her name was Toulou Maynes and she was the Saint of Medicine.

Her only power was that she could cure injuries and illnesses, which was the same as saying she had no fighting skills. She and her medical followers went around the world extending a helping hand to those seeking to be saved. She was a great Saint and someone Mora deeply respected.

"Temple Head...try to stay calm," Toulo said, but as she trembled, Mora was unable to respond. It was difficult to breathe and her vision was shaking. She was using all of her power just to maintain her composure.

"Forgive us Saint Toulo. My wife is not in a talking state. I'll hear what you have to say." Gunner then pulled on Mora's hand and tried to lead her into the residence, but Mora slipped out of his hand and once again sat down on the sofa.

"Sorry. Tell me again."

"Yes Temple Head. Sheniera's illness....there is nothing I can do."

Two weeks prior Sheniera had complained about a terrible pain in her chest. It was slightly to the left of the center of her chest and on her skin a strange bruise appeared, which looked like a centipede. It was a sickness they had never seen before.

The pain got worse day by day and soon it was so bad that it made her cry out in pain. There had been absolutely no way to cure the sickness and after ten days it was so bad that she was clawing at her chest, to the point where her nails were digging into her skin.

Mora exhausted all options. She saw the resident doctor at the temple, called to the top doctor in the kingdom, and then tried to heal her with the power of the mountains. After that she wrote a letter to Toulo who had been in a remote land and requested that she come to the head temple on her fastest horse.

"..What's...What's happening? Tell me Toulo."

However, as soon as Toulo finally managed to arrive at the temple three days ago, Sheniera's pain had suddenly disappeared. There were scars on her chest from her digging her nails into her skin, plus the centipede-like bruise was still there, but other than that she seemed fine.

Leaning her head to the side, Toulo checked Sheniera's condition.

Mora figured that since the pain had been cured there was probably nothing to worry about. Unfortunately, her expectations were crushed by what Toulo said next.

"There is some kind of mysterious insect nesting inside her heart, but it cannot be seen nor heard. I've tried all the medicines I can think of, but I have no idea why none of them have worked. Even administering the medicine directly into the insect with a needle to her chest did not work."

"What will happen? What will happen to Sheniera?"

"...I don't know."

"Please. Tell me it's not true."

Toulo shook her head and held her face as tears spilled down from her eyes. "Ah, poor Mora. I'm so sorry, please forgive me."

No words of blame appeared in Mora's mind. Toulo had done everything in her power. And if even after using all of her energy the illness remained, then Sheniera...

"...Mom. Dad." There was a knock on the parlor door accompanying Sheniera's voice from the other side.

"Gunner, please.... Don't tell her."

"Ah, alright." It wasn't that he wasn't sad either. No, he must have received a larger shock than her. But out of some sense of obligation he was feeling to support Mora, he barely managed to maintain his calm.

"Sheniera, your mom is having an important conversation right now. It's a topic for the Saints so you can't hear it." Gunner said to their daughter on the other side of the door.

"Dad, am I no good?" Mora could hear the anxiety in Sheniera's voice.

"What are you talking about? You're not in pain anymore right? Toulo-obasan said that you'll be alright now."

"I'm better? There's nothing wrong with my chest?"

"Yes, and in a little while even the bruise on your chest will fade. You got better because you toughed it out. You're a good kid."

Sheniera and Gunner then walked away from the door, down the hall. And as they did, they left behind Mora, who silently sobbed while looking on wordlessly.

#

After that Toulo left a number of medicines behind and left the head temple. Mora tried to keep her from leaving, but Gunner stopped her. There was nothing she could do even if she stayed. Besides, as the Saint of Medicine she had an obligation to save the suffering people around the world.

Mora then left her duties as the temple head to her husband and closed herself off in her room. And it seemed like Sheniera was worried that this time it was her mother who had gotten sick.

However, three days after Toulou's departure they received a letter from her. "Urgent" was written on the cover of the letter, with a proviso that no one other than Mora should be allowed to see the letter's contents.

In her room devoid of other people, Mora read the letter. First her emotions turned into fear, but then they changed into anger.

#

"What in the world happened, Mora?"

It was in the middle of the night, five days after Mora had received the letter from Toulou. A Saint was standing in front of Mora, but they weren't in the head temple's parlor. Their location was a small, old castle two days away from the temple if a horse carriage rushed there.

There was no one inside the old castle or the surrounding area. Even the coachman was keeping his distance. It was a cold place and as still as death.

"Ah this is tiresome. I want to drink. If you have business let's hurry and get it over with."

After saying that the woman combed a hand through her dyed red hair. She was wearing a gorgeous dress and flashy makeup which weren't very Saint-like.

The alcoholic stench of a hangover drifted over to Mora. She was a beautiful woman, but she appeared to be a sloth.

Her name was Marmanna Keynes. She was the Saint of Words.

"It was terrible of me to call on you suddenly. I apologize for my rudeness." Mora bowed her head.

"There's something I've wanted to ask you for a long time. Can I?"

"What is it?"

"Why don't you age? How do you preserve your youth?"

"By eating vegetables and not staying up late."

"...Well you're no hope."

It doesn't matter anyway, Mora thought.

Marmanna was a Saint bestowed with power from the God of Words.

It was probably safe to say that even among the 78 saints there were some who considered that power heresy. Yet though it had absolutely no utility within battle, it was extremely useful.

The power of the Saint of Words could stop people from lying and make people keep promises. One was not allowed to break a promise made with Marmanna because if they did there would be suitable reparations to pay. It was a fate no one could run away from. In fact, even if Marmanna died the person would still have to pay the reparation. No matter what kind of ability a Saint possessed, or what kind of ability a Kyoma had, they could not nullify the Saint of Words' power.

The power had been used for generations, and in the past the previous women who held the title of Saint of Words had been present at transactions involving royalty, aristocrats, and important businessmen.

"Well, a matter where you call me is probably not a good one. Is it a backroom deal? Or do you want me to seal the lips of an adulterous lover."

"...It's a secret negotiation. I want to request your guarantee that these dealings are a success. It would be a big problem for me if the promises were broken later on."

Marmanna grinned.

"Really? A backroom deal from the highly moral Mora-sama? Whatever it is, this is going to be fun."

"My daughter has been taken hostage. I'm heading off to negotiate with the one responsible."

The letter had been delivered to Mora's residence with Toulo's name, but the contents revealed that it had been sent by the person who had planted the parasite within Sheniera. They had indicated a date and time and demanded that Mora come to this old castle. And if Mora didn't comply the letter added that Sheniera's life would end.

"What? Sheniera-chan was kidnapped? Hahahah," Marmanna laughed maliciously.

Mora glared at her, but Marmanna was not perturbed in the slightest. So she then urged the Saint of Words to walk with her into the old castle. The other negotiation party was there waiting.

"Isn't that brat just something you gave birth to?¹ I must say I wonder what the big deal is."

"If you have a child you'll understand. And if you don't, then for the rest of your life you'll never know."

¹ ガキなんてこさえるもんじゃないわね。

"But there are a lot of parents who don't know that even after giving birth."

Mora didn't say anything to her response and instead changed the subject. "I also called Welynn, but she couldn't make it."

"Welynn? What do you intend to do by calling that idiot?"

The Saint of Salt was one of the Saints that Mora had instructed a month ago. She was skilled in close-range combat, and she could use her power to drive away and purify poisons and evil presences.

"I can depend on her as a warrior. And as a person."

"...Hey, by any chance will the other party be dangerous?" Marmanna's face went stiff.

"We are nearing the meeting place. I understand that you can't sense it, but the presence before us seems to be a powerful enemy."

In the centermost part of the castle they finally reached a place that looked like the king's throne room. A strange sound, like something was chewing was echoing out from the room. But it didn't sound like a human eating. Rather, it seemed to be coming from a beast or something far more repulsive.

Someone was having a meal, with a roughness of a glutton.

Eventually the two of them found the source of the sound sitting in the ruined throne. There was trash scattered all around the throne, such as the feet and feathers of a small bird, half-eaten figs, raw oats, and frog legs. In the seat was a single large Kyoma biting into a freshly-severed boar head. And right before their eyes the Kyoma placed the entire head into its mouth in an instant.

It had the head of a lizard, but the body of a beast. And three wings stretched out from its back. Through her intuition Mora guessed he was the writer of the letter, Tgurneu.

"Hello."

"Tgurneu, I presume. You're an extremely vile being," Mora said as she looked up at Tgurneu and watched him suck on his palms.

"That's rude. It's in my nature to be a heavy eater. I'll die of starvation in no time at all if I drop one of my meals. But wait a moment while I clean up."

Whether it was out of good manners or not, Tgurneu started to pick up all the scraps on the ground and put them into a bag he was carrying. Then when he was finished he approached the two women.

"It's nice to meet you, Mora. My name is Tgurneu. I am the top follower of the great Majin."

He touched his hand to his chest in a respectful salute. Though his body was very different from a human's, he carried himself and moved about in a very humanlike way. It was an unbearably eerie sight.

"....Aha,ahaha, Mora this is a bit surprising," Marmanna said, though her voice was shaking.

"Excuse me, but who is this beautiful person?" Tgurneu asked.

"She is Marmanna the Saint of Words. I'm entrusting the business dealings to her."

"Didn't I say you had to come alone?"

"Your letter didn't say that."

Tgurneu shrugged. Then he bowed to Marmanna in the same way he had bowed to Mora.

"Well that's fine. It's never a problem to be close to a beautiful woman, no matter how many times it happens."

"...Aha, I'm admired by a Kyoma."

Tgurneu approached Marmanna and extended his hand. Though Marmanna seemed to be wondering what he was thinking, she still took his hand and bowed as manners dictated.

"From now we will begin the negotiations, but Marmanna promise me one thing. You will not tell anyone else about what we talk about here today."

"Naturally. If this kind of story were to be leaked to others it would cause a big uproar," Marmanna said, and then she activated her ability as the Saint of Words.

A small ball of light emerged from the tip of her index finger. She then pointed it to herself and began to speak. "I pledge to the God of Words. I will not speak of what happens in this place today to anyone. If I break this pledge, it will be okay for me to die."

The ball of light then flew into Marmanna's chest, completing the pledge. Now, not even Marmanna herself could undo it.

"Tgurneu, will you make the pledge as well? You won't speak of what happened here to humans, Kyoma, or The Majin. You don't mind right?"

If what happened in that place were exposed to the world it would be the end of Mora.

She would be banished from the head temple and then probably lose her qualification as the Saint of Mountains. And as for the family of a criminal who dealt with the Kyoma, her husband and daughter would probably also be persecuted.

"That's fine," unexpectedly Tgurneu quickly agreed.

"If I don't pledge, I probably won't get you to make a deal with me. And you would have visited for no reason."

Marmanna produced a ball of light and Tgurneu made his contract. The light then went into his chest and the contract was completed. The power of the Saint of Words also worked on Kyoma. It was a fact proven by an experiment conducted about two years ago on a captured Kyoma.

"Well Mora, aren't you going to make the pledge too?"

"Is that necessary?"

"...Well, I guess that's fine." Tgurneu shrugged. "So then, shall we begin the negotiations? As you know, one of my underlings has produced a parasite which is now nesting in the heart of your daughter. There is no way to remove it other than by my order to destroy itself."

"With a snap of my fingers your daughter would experience the suffering of hell, which would then bring about her death. So far she only knows the tip of that suffering."

The ten days of hell Sheniera had suffered. Tgurneu was dangling that memory in front of Mora as a threat, causing a dizzying anger to boil up inside her.

"However, relax Mora. I do not wish to kill the adorable Sheniera. If you listen to my request then Sheniera will absolutely be released. And as soon as I give the order for it to destroy itself, the parasite will vanish."

"What's your demand?"

"Doesn't it go without saying? We only have one desire."

Tgurneu spread his arms out wide and started to use body language and gestures like a bad actor as he continued. "When the Majin awakens the humans and the Kyoma will battle for the third time in our history. And the time of that decisive battle is already close at hand."

"State your demands."

"Mora. I want you to kill the Heroes of the Six Flowers."

"I refuse," Mora answered in an instant.

For a moment Tgurneu just stared at her silently.

"...Oh?"

"If the Heroes of the Six Flowers are defeated the world will end. And if The Majin is fully revived both my daughter and my husband will be killed, which would make any deal I made with you meaningless."

Marmanna looked at Mora wide-eyed.

"Wait a sec, are you serious? Didn't you come here to save Sheniera-chan?"

Mora didn't respond. She just folded her arms to hide her trembling hands.

In reality she wanted to cling to Tgurneu's feet at once and beg him for his mercy. She wanted to shout to him that she would do anything if it would save her daughter's life. But if she couldn't protect the world then she wouldn't be able to protect the daughter she loved either.

Tgurneu thought for a moment in silence. Then for some reason he began to clap. When he stopped, he smiled and said, "Good answer, Mora. I had thought you would respond like that."

"So let's continue the negotiations. The night is still long. And we have plenty of time to talk." Tgurneu brought over two chairs from the side of the throne. He then recommended them to Mora and Marmanna and he himself sat down among the castle rubble.

"Mora, I understand that you came here in order to save your daughter. This means that you came here to negotiate a deal. So it is necessary for us to talk."

After hesitating for a while, Mora sat down on the chair. And even though Marmanna was also confused, she too sat down.

"If you have another request I intend to comply. And if it is my life you wish I will present it at once. However, taking the lives of the Heroes is something I absolutely will not do."

"I see. But I don't need your life." Tgurneu eerily laughed. "I declare to you Mora. I will absolutely make you kill the Heroes of the Six Flowers."

Chapter Two: Part Two

I never imagined this would happen, Adlet thought as Tgurneu charged straight at him.

His initial explosive attack from beneath the ground had taken Adlet by surprise. But what surprised him even more was the idea that one of the enemy commanders would launch a surprise attack against them in person.

"Oops, I'd forgotten." Tgurneu suddenly stopped.

The others who had had their attacks dodged by Tgurneu encircled the Kyoma and readied their weapons. But Tgurneu was not perturbed at all and with a smile, he began to speak.

"Well, you shouldn't be so impatient Heroes of the Six Flowers. Isn't there something you should do before we fight?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Greetings of course. When you meet a person you say, 'hello'. When you depart you say, 'good bye'. Aren't greetings the first step to a bright life?"

Adlet didn't understand what Tgurneu was saying. Sure, he understood the meaning of the words, but he couldn't grasp the Kyoma's intent. However, at Adlet's side Hans nodded quickly.

"Hello, meow."

"That's right Hans. Hello to you too. Well then, shall we begin?"

Tgurneu opened his mouth and looked up to the sky. They couldn't hear his voice, but he was shouting something. He was sending a command to the Kyoma by using a particular frequency which no one except Kyoma could hear.

"Reinforcements were called," Fremy said.

From beyond the knoll and the northwest they could faintly hear the voices of the Kyoma echoing their way. It was at that moment when Adlet finally realized the reason for the absence of the Kyoma in the valley: it was so they could assemble their military strength for an ambush.

"This is bad, Adlet. What should we do?" Fremy asked.

"Isn't it obvious? Shoot him now! Attack all at once!" Mora shouted as she began to dash at Tgurneu, who at the moment seemed calm and perfectly composed. However, none of the others followed Mora's charge.

"Why are you hesitating?" Mora asked, suddenly stopping and jumping back.

"Come Adlet. What's wrong? Shall we not enjoy killing one another?" Grinning, Tgurneu took a step closer to Adlet.

Adlet didn't know what to do. The area would soon be surrounded, Tgurneu might be setting some kind of trap, and on top of that Adlet didn't know how the seventh would act.

Normally Adlet would have decided to run without hesitation. Atro had taught him that he must not fight on the enemy's turf.

But at the moment Adlet was not thinking rationally.

"Chamo! Hans! Goldof! Hold off the reinforcements coming from the northwest!" Adlet shouted, gripping his sword in his right hand.

"Fremy, back them up from afar! Mora, Rolonia, and I..." Adlet drew a smoke bomb from a belt at his waist, smashed it at Tgurneu's feet and then rushed forward through the smoke.

"I will go after Tgurneu."

Everyone moved simultaneously. Chamo stuck the foxtail grass down her throat and vomited out the so-called Jyuma¹ within her stomach. Then Hans and Goldof ran alongside the Jyuma to the northwest.

Fremy leaped backwards, readied her rifle and aimed it at Tgurneu. Her role was to keep him from moving with supporting attacks. Meanwhile, Mora circled around behind Tgurneu as Adlet charged at him from the opposite direction.

"Right, right," Tgurneu said. "I had thought you would try that."

Tgurneu's arm extended through the smoke and tried to hit Adlet, but he dropped to the ground and avoided the attack. Adlet then blocked the follow up strike with his sword and the shock from the impact made the bones in his arm numb. There was an overwhelming gap in both their power and their speeds. And even Adlet's smoke had been ineffective.

Mora then tried to bring down her armored fist onto Tgurneu's shoulder. However, the Kyoma dodged the attack just by moving his upper body. His flexible, effortless dodges were clearly the movements of someone that had studied martial arts. One after another Mora tried to strike him with her fists, but none of the blows even came remotely close to hitting Tgurneu.

"Adlet step back! You are no match for him!" Mora shouted.

¹ Jyuma 従魔, literally subordinate or slave demons. It is meant to contrast with Kyoma 凶魔, which means evil demons.

But Adlet had known that from the beginning. If he confronted him directly, no matter how much he struggled he wouldn't be able to stand a chance. However, it was that kind of opponent that Adlet had come so far to fight.

While his next attack did have the power to kill him, Adlet stopped the blow with his armored shoulder. His breath caught in his chest and his bones creaked. But then in that moment Adlet slammed the secret weapon he had been concealing in his left hand onto Tgurneu's arm.

It was a manacle connected to a long chain. The barbed at the edge of the metal fitting dug into Tgurneu's flesh and at the same time a sturdy wire wrapped tight around Tgurneu's arm.

"Muu," Tgurneu groaned.

Adlet then sheathed his sword and grabbed the chain with both hands. He pulled on Tgurneu's captured left arm with all his might, toppling his balance and causing his face to barrel right into Mora's punch.

"I see. So you intend to restrict my movements," Tgurneu said as he pulled on the chain with unbelievable strength. Realizing that he couldn't hold his ground, Adlet promptly jumped forward. And as Tgurneu lifted his left arm, Adlet's body was raised up into the air like a fish on a hook.

"Watch out!" Fremy shouted.

Tgurneu threw a follow up strike at his airborne target and Adlet barely managed to stop the blow with the iron slab fashioned into the heel of his shoe. A fierce pain rushed through his ankle and there was a slightly unpleasant sound, but Adlet did not let go of the chain.

Although Tgurneu's left arm had been captured by the chain, Adlet's tool had been largely ineffective at restricting Tgurneu. Nevertheless, Tgurneu's movements were indeed slightly slower.

Taking advantage of the slight opening in his defenses, Mora swung her fist at the Kyoma and Fremy shot her rifle. But since Adlet was preoccupied with the tug of war, his evasive movements were slow, resulting in Mora's fist grazing his face and Fremy's bullet piercing his shoulder.

"Don't let go Adlet!" Fremy shouted as she loaded another bullet into her rifle.

"I'm putting everything I have into holding him. You two finish him off!"

"Good Adlet! Hold him like that!" Mora blocked Tgurneu's fist with her armored hand, and tried to counter with a punch of her own. But then an inhuman shriek resounded across the battlefield.

"Don't speak you're nothing more than a filthy Kyoma piece of shit Danicas will not let him get away Adlet!"²

² Rolonia is speaking without any pauses in her speech, as if she were possessed. I have removed the punctuation to preserve the feeling in the original Japanese.

As Adlet pulled on the chain, he looked around the area, readying himself for a new enemy. He could see that Fremy had automatically repointed her rifle in the direction of the voice. And even Tgurneu's eyes had grown wide.

"I will show you his entrails I will tear out the entrails of this filthy Kyoma and show them to you." It was Rolonia, speaking unbelievably fast without taking a breath; her words malicious and murderous.

Rolonia, who had been watching the battle from afar, was now grabbing the whip at her side. She then raised it high into the air with both hands and when she swung it, the 30-meter metal whip twisted about like a living creature. The tip of the whip almost couldn't even be seen by the naked eye.

Tgurneu bent his upper body and avoided the whip, but the tip slightly grazed his chest.

The next moment a large amount of blood gushed out of his chest. It was the same red as human blood.

"Guu." The grunt was the first sound of pain that had slipped out from Tgurneu's mouth

² Also, I'm unsure what exactly Danicas refers to. My guess is that it might be the name of her alter ego as I have not been able to find the phrase in any dictionary.

Adlet knew about Rolonia's power. The core of the whip had been soaked with her blood and ran through the entire weapon. And by using that blood she could make the whip move in a way that a normal whip couldn't.

And on top of that, that whip forced out the blood of any opponent it touched.

"No way," Adlet muttered. Rolonia had matured in a way that was far from what Adlet had expected.

"The blood will not stop. Show me your insides. Show me your entrails. I will chew them apart." Rolonia continued to swing her whip with a look on her face that seemed to suggest that she was no longer the companion they had traveled with and that she did not want to run.

Meanwhile Adlet desperately held onto Tgurneu. The strength in his arms was overwhelming and Adlet simply couldn't compare. However, Adlet knew how to pull on the chain at the right moment. If Tgurneu pulled on the chain he loosened his hold, and if Tgurneu released his energy Adlet pulled in the opposite direction. How to capture someone with a chain was another one of the skills Atro had taught him.

Tgurneu tried to remove the shackle digging into his left arm, but Fremy shot at him and prevented him from succeeding. And in that opening Mora landed a swift blow that sent Tgurneu flying backwards.

Adlet grunted as Rolonia's whip scraped his ear, but he couldn't let go of the chain. As they twirled about in the air and then tumbled across the ground, Adlet continued to hang. He only hoped Rolonia still had enough sense to avoid accidentally killing her own ally.

The ground was red with all the blood gushing out of Tgurneu. *Can we really defeat him like this?* Adlet thought.

Then a single shot rang across the battlefield and Rolonia stopped swinging her whip. Fremy had shot at Rolonia. The bullet hadn't hit her, but it did pass by her eyes.

"What are you doing Fremy?!" Adlet shouted without thinking.

"You were in danger," Fremy said as she loaded another bullet into her rifle.

Gripping her whip with both hands, Rolonia glared at Fremy. And for a moment it looked like there was a risk that Rolonia would attack her, but then she turned her murderous gaze back to Tgurneu.

"Oh my, disagreements among friends are harsh. What in the world could be going on with all of you?" Tgurneu said, pretending to play dumb. Using the pause in their attacks, he tried to remove the shackle from his left arm, but Fremy fired a bullet into his right hand.

"Adlet, don't lower your guard. We don't know who the enemy is," Fremy said as she readied her rifle. Adlet could tell just by looking at her that though she was aiming at Tgurneu, she was also carefully watching both Mora and Rolonia's movements.

"I'm the strongest man in the world. I don't need protection. Concentrate on killing Tgurneu."

"That's right Fremy. Refrain from careless movements," Mora added, yet her words also seemed to suggest that she was watching Fremy as well.

Adlet ground his teeth. Watching Fremy would only get in their way. On the other hand, if they were off guard then they wouldn't know what the seventh was doing. And the fact of the matter was that Adlet still didn't know who the seventh was, and he was once again feeling the difficulty of that predicament.

For the time being the battle consisted of each one of them glaring at one another and looking for an opening to strike. Adlet was standing in front of the bound Tgurneu, Mora and Rolonia were closing in from both sides, and Fremy was behind them all, waiting to see what would happen.

"Kill,Kill,Kill,Kill,Kill," Rolonia repeated as she gradually neared the Kyoma.

But then Tgurneu suddenly said, "I give up. I made a mistake. It wasn't my intent to attack you all by surprise."

No one responded to him.

"I came out of the ground and I realized you were all surprised, but I hadn't thought that you would all then gang up on me." Tgurneu then began to laugh. "What do you think? Was my joke just now funny?"

"...It was awful," Mora said.

"Hmm. So it was dull. Human jokes are difficult."

Tgurneu then placed his hand on his chin and at that exact moment Rolonia shouted and started to swing her whip again. Simultaneously, Fremy fired a bullet into Tgurneu's back.

The two of them and Mora attacked Tgurneu all at once, while Adlet, at the risk of his own life, continued to cling onto the chain.

It was probably safe to say that they were winning the fight. However, Tgurneu never dropped his carefree attitude.

Adlet looked over to the hills to the northwest. There Chamo's Jyuma had assumed battle formations and were meeting the Kyoma's charge. Flying Kyoma were also approaching, but Hans was hurling his swords up into the air and cutting them down. And Goldof had jumped into the center of the enemies, cutting the Kyoma coming from each direction to shreds. There was no sign that their defense would crumble.

While dodging Rolonia's whip Tgurneu said, "You must not act like this Rolonia. Vulgar words will lower the value of your heart." He then pulled on the chain and spoke to Adlet." This shackle was made well. After all your hard work, will you give it to me?"

A large amount of blood had spilled out of him and his body was being torn to pieces. Nevertheless Tgurneu didn't stop his frivolous talk.

Adlet couldn't figure out what his intentions were. It seemed like he had just come to be killed.

Fremy then moved behind Adlet and quietly said, "...Even if we fight like this we won't be able to win."

Staring at Tgurneu, Adlet didn't respond.

"Defeating Tgurneu will need, at a minimum, five times the power of this attack."

Adlet was shocked. He had thought they were winning, but in reality they were nothing more than at a standstill.

"If we continue to fight like this we may be able to win. But right before that happens the seventh will definitely attack. They may launch a surprise attack that will end up killing you, or they may attack you and pretend it had been friendly fire."

Fremy looked to the northwest.

"Or they may aim for Hans or Chamo and..."

Mora and Rolonia were gradually closing the distance between themselves and Tgurneu. However, Tgurneu was always prepared for their attacks without ever losing his smile.

"It's not a problem. We'll carry on the fight."

"..."

"Relax. I can see a way for us to win."

Adlet had a secret plan, and he wasn't just concealing it from Tgurneu, but also from Fremy, Mora, and Rolonia too.

He had a deadly weapon built into the left shoulder of his armor. It was his master Atro's last secret weapon which he'd passed down to him about half a year ago. Atro had called it his greatest masterpiece, a weapon which could kill any Kyoma in a single blow.

Putting all of his energy into restraining Tgurneu was nothing more than the groundwork for that final weapon.

He would make Fremy, Mora and Rolonia focus on watching out for Tgurneu's attacks. Then when there was an opportunity he would perform his final strike.

Adlet would not miss the moment when Tgurneu's movements would slow and his attention would turn away from Adlet. So for the moment Adlet was waiting for that opportunity.

Mora and Rolonia were getting closer. And even as he gripped the chain, Adlet was waiting for a chance to jump on Tgurneu.

But then in that moment, Tgurneu said, "I shall tell you one good thing."

It had taken them by surprise. And the three of them stopped without thinking about it.

"Adlet, you believe that fighting you alone like this may be some kind of trap. However, you're mistaken. I came straight out to kill you all."

"...Don't listen to him," Fremy said.

"Any time now I will start to make a serious effort. And then I will use my trump card."

What is he planning, Adlet thought. If he really intended to use a trump card then he wouldn't need to announce it. Did he have some kind of objective, or was he just bluffing?

Then a strange transformation happened on Tgurneu's chest. His flesh began to wriggle like it had a pulse then formed a giant amphibian mouth.

Tgurneu thrust his right hand into the mouth in his chest. And at that moment Adlet and the others moved. Rolonia's whip swung downwards for his neck, and Fremy aimed her bullets at the new mouth. But even though his left arm was still connected to the chain, Tgurneu dodged the attacks like he was dancing.

"Please pay close attention. This is my trump card."

Tgurneu pulled out his right hand from the mouth in his chest. It was holding a giant fig fruit. He then chewed the fruit and said, "I chose the wrong thing."

Fremy fired a bullet into Tgurneu's head, causing him to lurch back while still holding onto the fig. Mora then leaped at him and repeatedly punched him in the sides. And Rolonia's whip hit his shoulder and blood gushed out. Yet Tgurneu simply laughed and fought back.

"Wait, Wait for me. Let me use my secret weapon."

Although Tgurneu was restricted by the chain, Adlet had an eerie hunch that they must not let him use his so-called trump card. If they couldn't stop him before that then things would get very bad. He searched for a moment where he could use his own secret weapon in his shoulder's armor.

But his impatience created an opening. Seeing Adlet release the power in his left arm, Tgurneu pulled on the chain as hard as he could on the chain in the opposite direction. And the moment Adlet staggered, Tgurneu bit through the chain. His power was different than it was before. Until now he hadn't shown his true strength.

"Shit!"

Tgurneu made a giant leap and escaped their circle around him. When he landed he started to dash towards the reinforcements to the northwest.

It was frighteningly fast; either on par with Hans or even faster. Adlet tried to stop Tgurneu with his throwing knives, but his attempts didn't slow him down even one second.

"Now is the time to use it."

Tgurneu again thrust his hand into the mouth in his chest and took out a number of explosives the size of grapes. And as he ran he tossed them up into the sky.

At the edge of the knoll Hans, Goldof, and Chamo were holding off the reinforcements. The number of Kyoma that had appeared wasn't very large. In fact, it was about 300 which was less than a thirtieth of the entire Kyoma forces.

The battle was even. Despite the difference in numbers, the 70 Jyuma were holding back the Kyoma. If Tgurneu joined the battle he would break the equilibrium of the fight at once.

"Hans! Goldof! Meet Tgurneu's attack!" Adlet shouted.

But before they could respond, the bombs Tgurneu threw exploded in front of their faces. Through the smoke they could see a glittering silver powder rain down on the Jyuma. The next moment they could hear a burning sound, which was followed by white smoke that started to rise from the Jyuma's bodies.

"...Huh?" Chamo muttered. But then the Jyuma began to scream and writhe in pain on the ground.

"Meow, what is this? Ahh."

Hans pressed his hands to his eyes. He, the Kyoma and the Jyuma were all covered in the same amount of the silver powder. However, the Kyoma weren't displaying any signs of suffering.

"What is this?! Everyone! What happened?! Get a hold of yourselves!"

Chamo was in a panic and embraced one of the Jyuma near her. At the same time, the Kyoma in the area prepared for an all-out attack. And on top of that, Tgurneu was rushing right towards her.

"Hans! Goldof! Protect Chamo!" Adlet shouted and the two immediately rushed over to her side and attacked the Kyoma coming to attack her. And Fremy fired from behind him, hitting Tgurneu in the legs and stopping his sprint.

Mora and Rolonia then pursued and attacked Tgurneu in order to protect Chamo.

In an instant the battle turned into a brawl. And now that Chamo's Jyuma could no longer attack, the Kyoma started to attack the Heroes from all sides. And while the Flowers desperately avoided their attacks, they also had to defend against Tgurneu's strikes.

Chamo, however, was the only one not moving. She was simply frozen to the spot as she stared at the Jyuma thrashing on the ground.

"Chamo! Pull yourself together!" Adlet shouted as he protected her from the approaching Kyoma. But Chamo didn't seem to have heard what he'd said. She didn't seem to be able to see the situation around her. She just clung to a giant slug Jyuma and started to wipe off the silver power that clung to its skin.

"What is this?! It's hot! It's so hot!"

As Chamo wiped down the Jyuma's body smoke also began to rise from her body. In a flash Adlet understood what was going on. The silver powder was causing a heat reaction to occur.

He had learned from Atro that there were chemicals, when touched, would cause extreme heat. Perhaps the bombs Tgurneu had thrown about had scattered that chemical powder. And since all of Chamo's Jyuma were amphibian-type creatures, the heat would be fatal. Tgurneu's trump card was an extremely powerful crushing blow.

Adlet looked around and saw Rolonia surrounded by Tgurneu and the Kyoma. She was receiving the brunt of their attack, while Mora and Fremy tried to protect her as best they could.

"Chamo! Make the Jyuma fight for us! We'll be wiped out if they don't."

"Chamo can't! Everyone is injured. If they aren't treated quickly they will all die!"

Chamo then started to sob like a child. She opened her mouth wide and screamed, "Uuuh! Everyone! Come back! Come back!"

And one by one the Jyuma covered in silver powder were sucked into Chamo's mouth. Each time she swallowed one, Chamo grunted in pain. Then she vomited out a boiling white mucus. The Jyuma were being cleansed of the silver powder clinging to them within the swamp in her stomach.

"Everyone come back! You'll be worn out and destroyed if you stay like this!" Chamo shouted and gradually the Jyuma faded from the battlefield.

"Chamo! Don't pull them back!" Adlet shouted unconsciously.

"Shut up!" Chamo again sucked in a number of Jyuma and vomited out the white mucus.

"Think about the situation! We'll be wiped out without them."

"Shut up! Shut up! Shut up! Chamo doesn't care about that!"

As Chamo screamed and stomped her feet in frustration, the Kyoma were rushing towards her. Adlet strained himself to hold them off.

"Chamo's pets are in pain! They are cute children and they are saying they are in pain and that it hurts! What do you know?! Chamo's pets are in pain!"

All of the Jyuma had left the battlefield and now three hundred Kyoma were bearing down on the Heroes of the Six Flowers.

The heroes had completely lost control. The Kyoma surrounding them were attacking with all their might. And Tgurneu had stopped fighting and was now just watching the battle from a distance.

"You messed up, isn't that right Adlet?" Tgurneu asked. "You all should have run. You should have at least known that you weren't prepared for this fight."

"...Shit!"

Cutting down the Kyoma coming towards him, Adlet pointed his sword at Tgurneu.

"Stop Adlet! You'll be killed," Fremy shouted, but she too had her hands full fighting the Kyoma and couldn't assist him.

"Get back! You're no match for him!" Mora said, but her warning didn't make Adlet lower the sword he had aimed at Tgurneu.

"It'd be better if you gave up this rash behavior. I recommend you to run," Tgurneu said and then laughed.

"...U, uaahhh!" Adlet screamed and charged at Tgurneu. From an outsider's perspective, it would probably look like Adlet were rushing towards Tgurneu to attack him in a blind rage. It was clear that no matter how hard Adlet struggled he would not be able to land a solid hit on Tgurneu.

However, Adlet had a plan. His seemingly reckless attack was just an act in order to make Tgurneu drop his guard. And it would definitely create an opening in

Tgurneu's defense. And as if realizing his superiority, the Kyoma relaxed his guard. To him it would look like Adlet had lost all rational sense.

"...You've succumbed to despair," Tgurneu said as he extended his arm and swung it downwards like a sword.

Adlet rolled along the ground, easily avoiding the attack. Then immediately he got back on his feet and continued his advance.

"Meow! What are you doing?!" Hans rushed over to Adlet in order to protect him. And for just a moment the two of them exchanged glances.

Someone like Hans should realize that Adlet was trying to draw away Tgurneu's attention by acting as a decoy. He should be able to do what Adlet wished.

Tgurneu shoved Adlet away and he crashed to the ground. Three Kyoma approached from behind him, two of which were barring him from escaping to the left or right. But Adlet got back on his feet, ignored the three Kyoma surrounding him and pointed his sword at Tgurneu.

"Watch out!"

At that moment Hans made a giant leap into the circle of Kyoma.

Everyone probably thought that Adlet had lost control of himself and that Hans was trying to help him. But Adlet caught Hans with his arms, who then used them as a stepping stool to launch himself at Tgurneu.

Tgurneu was caught by surprise. He took a defensive posture to try and block Hans' sword. But Hans wasn't trying to attack him.

Hans was aiming for the shackle biting into Tgurneu's left arm and the tip of the torn off chain extending from it. Still in the air, Hans sheathed his sword and grabbed the chain. Then with all the strength in his body he yanked on the metal, restraining Tgurneu's left arm.

At the same time Adlet had thrown a smoke pellet at his feet. The Kyoma surrounding him stopped moving and in an instant Adlet had escaped their circle.

Tgurneu tried to tear Hans away with his right arm, but Mora rushed over and seized it in her arms.

And as Adlet ran at Tgurneu, who had both of his hands restrained, he pulled out the secret weapon built into the armor of his left shoulder.

It was a nail about 20 centimeters long. From the outside it looked like some ordinary nail. However, the tip of the nail housed the blood of a Saint.

It was common knowledge that the blood of Saints was poison for the Kyoma. But other than the Saint of Fresh Blood there was no one who had used it as a weapon up till now. That was because in order to kill an upper level Kyoma like Tgurneu, one would require to use about a cup of blood. Atro had succeeded in extracting the poison from the Saint's blood and crystalizing it. And the tip of the nail was made from that poison crystal.

If a Kyoma were stabbed with that nail, the poison would instantaneously run through their body. Curing it with some kind of antidote nor extracting it from the body with some ability were completely impossible.

Atro had named it the Nail of the Saints and had called it his greatest masterpiece.

Sensing danger, Tgurneu tried to kick Adlet, but Adlet bent down, dodged the attack, and then took a step forward. Grasping the Nail of the Saints tightly, he stabbed it into Tgurneu's side.

Eight years ago that Kyoma had stolen his hometown. His sister had been killed, he'd lost his best friend and his peaceful life had been lost.

To kill that Kyoma. That was the sole reason he had gotten stronger.

Adlet thrust the Nail of the Saints deeper into Tgurneu's stomach.

"I did it!"

"Spot on Adlet!" Both Mora and Hans shouted as they jumped away from Tgurneu.

Then a sound came from Tgurneu as his body started to convulse violently, a sign of the poison flowing through him³.

The initial symptoms were that the body's nervous system would fall into massive disorder and severe pain would attack the body. After that the Kyoma would lose all sense of equilibrium. And on top of that they would have hallucinations, hear voices, and experience a loss of memory. What was waiting for them at the end of their five or ten days of suffering was certain death.

Standing right where he was, Adlet just stared at the convulsing Tgurneu. He felt a terrible sense of calm. It was a peaceful feeling.

Was it enough, Adlet thought.

"Look out!" Mora shouted, just as Adlet was viciously hit in the face. And right away he started to lose consciousness without any time to even consider what had happened.

³ In the Japanese there is an onomatopoeia sound ずくん However it may have been created by the author as I can't find any definitions for the sound.

"Adlet, are you really trying to kill me?"

As his vision faded to black, the last thing he saw was Tgurneu with the Nail of the Saints still in his side, calmly shaking his fist.

Chapter Two: Part Three

Mora had thought that Tgurneu was finished. When Adlet had stabbed the nail-like weapon into Tgurneu's side, she thought they had finally grasped victory into their hands. Tgurneu was violently convulsing and Adlet tried to check whether he had won, staring simply at Tgurneu as if he were enjoying the spectacle.

But then Tgurneu swung his arm at Adlet as if nothing had happened.

"Look out!" Fremy shouted, but it was too late. Adlet's body twirled through the air, crashed to the ground, and tumbled about 20 meters before coming to a complete stop.

"Adlet!" Fremy screamed in a despairing voice.

"...What? Ad-kun?" Rolonia asked, who had been spewing vulgarities at the Kyoma while kicking them around.

Then her eyes widened. As if the whip-swinging warrior had been a different person entirely, she returned to the timid girl she had been before.

The Kyoma started to rush over towards Adlet's fallen body to finish him off, but before they could reach him Mora jumped to his side and lifted him onto her shoulder. Feeling his neck, she verified that his bones weren't broken and that he was still breathing.

"Hey, are you alive?" Tgurneu asked, with the nail still stabbed in his side. He calmly approached Mora as Kyoma assembled around him to protect him.

The battle was hopeless. Chamo was no longer fighting and they had lost Adlet. Far from being able to kill Tgurneu, it was likely that they would all be annihilated.

We have no choice but to use the trump card, Mora thought as she carried Adlet.

"Mora, do you still intend to fight? Well, that's to be expected I suppose."

Glaring at Tgurneu, Mora prepared herself for what was to come. Retreat was not an option and they couldn't run away from an opportunity to kill Tgurneu.

Mora had a reason why she had to kill Tgurneu, but the moment she made up her mind to take action Hans appeared in front of her and stood in her way. He took Adlet's unconscious body from Mora and said, "Mora. Let's get out of here. You still don't have to use it."

Hans most likely didn't know about the trump card. However, just by looking at Mora's expression he understood that she was about to do something.

Mora's trump card involved blowing herself up along with Tgurneu.

"Mora, hold Tgurneu, meow! Goldof will bring everyone's possessions! Other than that, everyone run!" Hans shouted.

He then ran, weaving his way through the Kyoma rushing towards him. He picked up Chamo who was crouching and spitting out some mucus-like substance. Then while carrying both her and Adlet he dashed faster than the eye could see.

"Let go of me idiot! Idiot, idiot, idiot! Chamo can still fight!" Chamo hit Hans' back over and over, but he didn't pay her any mind.

"What makes you think I'll let you go?" Tgurneu asked as he started to pursue Hans, but Mora noticed and attacked him from his side.

Hans' words had helped Mora regain her composure. This wouldn't be the only chance they would have to kill Tgurneu. They should escape and regain their strength.

"Mora, I'll back you up." Fremy said, throwing a bomb that scattered the Kyoma around Tgurneu.

"Run...run....how..." Shaken up, Rolonia blocked the Kyoma's attacks while looking around her surroundings.

"Rolonia! Get out of here too! Follow Hans!" Mora shouted.

Finally coming to her senses, Rolonia followed in Hans' direction. However, the knoll was completely surrounded. Rolonia swung her whip and Hans fought back against the Kyoma with his feet, but the two of them couldn't find a way out.

"Everyone get down!" Fremy shouted and chucked bombs all over the place indiscriminately. A number of Kyoma were blown to pieces, and even Rolonia and Hans were injured. Nevertheless it managed to open a small way out.

"Mora! Let's get out of here too!" Fremy fired her rifle at Tgurneu, and taking that opportunity Mora and Fremy turned their backs on him and ran.

"Head to the mountains! Run until you reach The Eternal Flower!"

Mora and the others slipped out from the Kyoma surrounding them and rushed down the knoll. Goldof joined them carrying all of their belongings, and they all headed to the mountain, which at the moment was so far away that it looked like a lump.

"Fremy, you and I will bring up the rear," Mora said as they ran.

Tgurneu was approaching them with unbelievable speed. And it was Fremy and Mora's job to keep him at bay.

"There's no need to worry. I'm more skilled at running away from battles." Fremy said, and then readied her rifle.

#

Mora and the others continued to run, distancing themselves from the knoll and leaving the valley. However, their escape was taking them away from the continent to the east and deeper into the Wailing Demon Territory to the west.

Escaping the battle proved to be fiercer than the actual battle. And the person taking on the most dangerous role was Mora, who was running at the group's tail. She had to defend against Tgurneu's attacks while continuing to escape as well.

"Guu!"

Tgurneu was chasing after them once again. And when he came in range, Mora had to jump to the side to dodge his fist. Then one after another she blocked his attacks with her own armored fists.

Helping her from behind, Fremy fired her bullets at Tgurneu which grazed by Mora's face. When Tgurneu bent backwards to dodge the bullets, Mora kicked him in the gut and ran. Fremy then threw a bomb at Tgurneu, stopping him in his tracks.

Fremy wasn't bluffing when she said she was skilled at escaping from battles. It was precisely because of Fremy's assistance that Mora was somehow managing to get away.

The Heroes traveling ahead of them weren't having an easy time either. Over and over again Hans and the others were attacked by the Kyoma ambushing and surrounding them. However, Rolonia managed to block their attacks.

When they got out of the valley they could see a mid-sized mountain in the distance with Hans and Goldof already rushing up it. Beyond that was "The Bud of Eternity" and if they could manage to reach that point they would be safe for the time being.

The number of Kyoma pursuing them was gradually decreasing. Though they haven't distanced themselves from Tgurneu, the other Kyoma that he had brought with him were being cut down one by one.

"Look out!"

Tgurneu leaped towards them and when he landed he began to grapple with Mora. She restrained his wrists with both of her hands and the two of them entered into a power struggle. Tgurneu's strength was overwhelming and even with the power of the god of mountains it took all her might just to hold him for several seconds.

"Mora!" Fremy shouted as she came to Mora's rescue.

She threw some bombs behind Tgurneu and their explosions stunned him for a second. Quickly taking advantage of the opportunity, Mora flung Tgurneu aside and resumed her escape.

Tgurneu got back up, but wincing, he staggered slightly and was unable to fully stand. Looking closely, it was clear that Tgurneu was also injured. He had withstood multiple attacks from Mora, Fremy, and Rolonia. And though it didn't seem like it had been effective, Adlet's nail-like weapon was still stabbed into his stomach.

"...I think Tgurneu will withdraw soon," Fremy said while aiming her rifle at him. The Eternal Flower was probably just several minutes away. However, the Kyoma were scattered about and almost none were following after them.

Tgurneu gave a broad smile and took a giant step back.

"It has been about half a year since you left, and it seems like you have matured considerably. I'm happy."

Fremy didn't respond.

"It must be lonely, huh Fremy? And I'm sure that you must have a bunch of things you'd like to talk about. Hey, why don't you return to us? Betraying you was unavoidable. Even now I...."

Fremy fired a bullet at his face, cutting him off. However, he caught the projectile with his teeth then spat it to the ground and shrugged.

"Get lost."

"I understand how you feel Fremy. You're afraid that your resolve might falter. And you're thinking that if we continue to talk like this you'll be persuaded. Naturally you're such a sweet child."

Mora watched in silence as Fremy ground her teeth. Her position was complicated. And probably the feelings she harbored towards Tgurneu were also complicated.

As she looked on at the two of them glaring at one another, Mora recalled the events from an hour earlier. It was before they had been ambushed by Tgurneu's surprise attack, when she had encountered the strange Kyoma in the Valley of Spilled Blood.

The message written on its back had said that she was out of time. It was without a doubt a message from Tgurneu.

"..."

Mora wanted to ask what he had meant by that. But she wouldn't be able to have that discussion while Fremy was watching. Her companions must not find out about the secret deal she'd made with Tgurneu three years ago.

They shouldn't even suspect that such a deal had occurred.

"Mora, we should go already. I'm worried about Adlet," Fremy said, then gradually stepped back. Tgurneu didn't look like he would follow them. He just idly stood there without any indication that he'd make a move.

"Is it really alright if I let you all end this fight?" Tgurneu asked.

Fremy ignored him, but Mora stopped.

"This might be your last chance to kill me. And since you're out of time, perhaps it is your only one."

"What do you mean by that?" Mora asked without thinking.

"You have two days remaining. Things will become very bad for you if you are not able to kill me by then. Very bad indeed."

"Two days left?" Mora asked, as Fremy pulled on her shoulder.

"Don't worry about him. It's a bluff. He wouldn't honestly tell us that if something were really going to happen in two days."

"...But."

Mora was hesitating and Fremy was urging her to run. And looking at the two of them, Tgurneu laughed and waved at them.

"Just as Fremy advised, let's let this go for today. Good bye Heroes of the Six Flowers. Until next time," Tgurneu said.

He then turned around and left. He was so much faster than she was that there was no way Mora could follow him.

There were no signs of any enemies in the vicinity. Somehow it seemed like the battle had really ended. Taking ragged breaths, Mora stared on in the direction Tgurneu had departed.

"He did a lot of playing around. Was such a person one of the Kyoma commanders?"

"As always, he makes me sick to my stomach," Fremy said, and then she pointed her rifle at Mora.

Mora wasn't so surprised. She didn't think Fremy was an enemy. If she were, she would have attacked her while Tgurneu was still there.

"What are you doing Fremy?!"

"I have something I want to ask you Mora," Fremy said, but murderous intent was not present in her eyes. Rather it was suspicion. Fremy was questioning whether she really wasn't the seventh.

"What happened between you and Tgurneu?"

"...Why do you think something happened?"

"Something about your expression seemed strange when he said, 'you're out of time.'"

Mora's heart raced in her chest, but she desperately tried to pretend she was calm. And to support that she created an expression of confusion in response to the unfounded suspicion.

"Strange? If I had a gun pointed at me for each reason there was like that, then even if I had a million lives I wouldn't be able to handle them all."

"Don't evade the question. Answer me directly."

"If I were to say there's nothing would you be satisfied?" Mora drew closer to Fremy and grabbed the muzzle of her rifle. She then forced it downward. "Fremy,

it's good that you are trying to see through to the seventh's true identity. But you shouldn't broadcast¹ your murderous feelings."

Fremy didn't respond; she just stared into Mora's eyes.

"Actually you're the suspicious one. You could be pretending to search for the seventh but really be looking for an opportunity to kill our companions. And what do you think the others would do if I claimed that after you accused me you tried to kill me?"

"...I understand." Fremy put away her rifle. Then she started to run towards 'The Everlasting Bud'.

Mora followed behind her. She'd somehow been able to sidestep the point in question. *But had I been able to do it well?* Mora wondered.

By nature she wasn't skilled at lying and rarely concealed anything. Mora made it a principle to do things upfront, and up until now she'd lived her life that way. She had lived her life believing that to live honestly without being two-faced was the best way to achieve happiness.

"I had thought Tgurneu was just bluffing, but then he declared a specific time which caught my interest. I wonder what he meant by 'there were two days left.'"

¹ Checked and this phrase has been used before TV/ radio to refer to spreading information/seeds since early 1800s

"...I don't know."

Mora didn't think that Tgurneu's words were a bluff. On the contrary, she was sure he was telling the truth, since there was no way that Tgurneu could lie to her.

Mora then recalled the events that had transpired three years ago. The time when she had to put up with making a deal with Tgurneu.

#

In the old castle devoid of any signs of human life, Mora stared at Tgurneu sitting atop a mountain of rubble. Beside her was Marmanna, looking at Mora anxiously.

It was safe to say Mora was lost about everything. However, she couldn't kill the Heroes of the Six Flowers. If she did that she would betray all the humans living in the world.

What should she do to save her daughter? Tgurneu was offering the troubled Mora various proposals to accomplish that feat.

"Why don't we compromise? It's okay if you only kill one person. Just one person among the six. That would be something you could accept, wouldn't it?"

Mora didn't respond.

"I give up. Even something like that is no good...? You're a cruel mother." Tgurneu said as Mora's body trembled in anger.

"For starters, it doesn't seem likely that you will return my daughter if I carry out this promise."

"Hmm..."

"You Kyoma break your promises with humans like it's nothing. So as long as I don't have proof you will carry out your promise these negotiations can't go forward," Mora said, and Tgurneu grinned.

"You're right."

"...About what?"

"Surely if I would like to be victorious then I would lie without giving it a second thought. I should have no intention of keeping the promises I make with humans."

Was he saying that from the beginning he had no intention of freeing her daughter? Mora thought.

"However, this time the circumstances are different. You must believe that I will unquestionably keep my promise to you. Kidnapping is a crime of trust. If there is no seed of a trusting relationship between the victims and the assailant then the criminal act will not succeed."

"You want me to trust you?"

Tgurneu then glanced at Marmanna sitting next to Mora.

"It helps that the Saint of Words is here. In the event that a negotiation is achieved, I shall pledge to the Saint of Words, promising that if I break the contract with you I would give up my life."

Mora's heart quivered. She thought about his proposal for a moment, and then answered.

"I can't do that."

"...Why?"

"The Kyoma's existence is one that they will throw away without any hesitation if it is in order to achieve victory. But what assurance do I have that your single life would make a difference?"

"I see. I expected such a question."

Tgurneu closed his eyes and thought for a while. "What you are pointing out is quite right. However, there are no Kyoma that could be considered my equals. Of the multitudes of Kyoma I am among the most powerful and I am one of the commanders that leads forty percent of the Kyoma. If I were to die the Kyoma would lose their chain of command and it would be a severe blow that they wouldn't recover from. In order to win against the Heroes of the Six Flowers my existence is essential."

"...A Kyoma commander?"

It was a phrase they could believe in. They were only looking at him, but Mora could tell that he possessed fearsome power. And the information that he commanded forty percent of the Kyoma didn't seem like a lie.

"I think offering a life such as mine makes this a proposal worth trusting."

"Marmanna. Can you confirm that his words are genuine?"

Marmanna extended her finger and borrowing the power of the God of Words, a small ball of light was produced at the tip. It then flew into Tgurneu's mouth.

"Try repeating what you said before."

"I am a Kyoma commander. I command forty percent of the Kyoma forces. If I were to die the Kyoma would lose their chain of command and it would inflict a devastating blow. If I am not here the Kyoma probably cannot defeat the Heroes of the Six Flowers."

If he had been lying the ball of light would have been expelled from his mouth and returned to Marmanna. But the ball remained within him.

"...It's the truth. Tgurneu is speaking the truth," Marmanna said. Nevertheless, now Mora couldn't trust him even more.

"Are you still unable to trust me? Well then let's do this. I will pledge to the Saint of Words that I will never lie to you. If I do, then it would be okay for my insides to be torn and scattered about. While we're at it, I will promise that I will release your daughter as well," Tgurneu said then pointed to the place where his heart would be if he were a human.

The core for the Kyoma was equivalent to a brain. And though he was a Kyoma that boasted an overwhelming vitality, if his core were destroyed he would surely die. A Kyoma absolutely had just one core. They were spheres with a metallic shine that ranged from as big as 50 centimeters in diameter to so small that they were smaller than the tip of a pinky.

"Let me actually show you." Tgurneu pressed his hand to his chest. Then he created a tear in the flesh of his chest and exposed his organs. But however his body may have been composed, not a single drop of blood came out. He was certainly pointing to the place where his core was located.

"Well, do you trust me?"

"Set up a contract with the Saint of Words. If you do that I will trust you."

Marmanna nodded and borrowed the power of the Saint of Words. A ball of light was formed and it was absorbed into Tgurneu's body.

"I pledge. I will not lie to Mora. If I lie, then it would be okay for the core in my chest to be smashed to pieces. And at the same time I would kill the parasite within Sheniera's chest without any hesitation."

Tgurneu's body lit up, signaling the completion of the contract.

"Is this alright? Finally we can begin the negotiation," Tgurneu said with a sigh and a shrug. "Well then I shall make my demands again. I want you to kill one of the Heroes of the Six Flowers."

"I can't accept that demand. I'll give you my life instead. Will that be enough to satisfy you?"

Tgurneu shook his head from side to side. "I refuse. Another person will just be chosen to become a Flower if you are killed."

"Asley, Weylynn, or Nashetania. In addition to my life I will give you the life of one of the Saints that will one day be chosen as a Hero. Would that be acceptable?"

"Hey!" the person who shouted was Marmanna listening to the side. "What are you thinking? You plan on murdering them?"

"Weren't you listening? That is the plan."

"...You're out of your mind!"

You're right, Mora thought. There's no way the mother of a daughter who had been taken hostage wouldn't be out of her mind.

"That won't work. I only want the life of a Hero of the Six Flowers. No matter how many candidates you kill I will not return your daughter. My demand is to kill one of the Flowers. That is all."

Tgurneu rejected her proposal. Thinking that she had no choice, Mora conceded.

"I will be chosen as one of the Heroes. Then after I am chosen, at that time I will end my life. How do you feel about that?"

"...That's no good."

"Why?!"

"If you are not chosen as one of the Flowers, then taking a hostage would be meaningless. And do you think that the Goddess of Fate would choose people who are brimming with the desire to kill themselves? I have no intention of changing my demand. Kill one of the Heroes. That is it."

For a long time Mora and Tgurneu stared at one another. But there was no indication that Tgurneu would give in.

"You understand, don't you? If we are not able to reach a deal then there will be no reason for me to let your daughter to keep on living."

"..."

"That's unfortunate," Tgurneu said and started to stand.

"Wait. I have a condition." If she broke off the negotiations then Sheniera would die, so she had no choice but to respond that way. "If you die, immediately release my daughter. Even if I don't kill one of the Heroes."

"...I'm sorry, but I can't accept that. If I did then you would just set about killing me with all your might." Tgurneu shook his head.

"Let's establish a deadline. I promise to kill one of the Flowers by that time. But if you are to die before then the contract will become invalid. I absolutely will not concede this condition."

"Hmm..."Tgurneu placed a hand on his narrow chin and thought silently for a moment. "When will this deadline be?"

"Twenty two days after the Majin awakens. If you are still alive by then, I promise to kill one of the Heroes on that day."

Keeping his hand on his chin, Tgurneu thought for a while."...That's appropriate," he said. "I understand. I shall accept that condition."

They had finally settled on one condition and now Mora could see a path to saving Sheniera.

"By the 22nd day after The Majin awakens, you will kill one of the Heroes of the Six Flowers. But if I die before that then the contract will become invalid and your daughter will also be released. Is that okay?"

Mora nodded.

"I want to add another request. Until the promised deadline comes don't touch my daughter."

"Of course. I promise. Until the 22nd day after the Majin awakens passes the Kyoma under me will not touch your daughter. And the Kyoma that I do not command will also absolutely not touch her."

They had somehow managed to make a deal. Yet, though she would be able to save Sheniera, a path had been created that would lead her to end up killing one of the Flowers. So it would be good for her to kill Tgurneu within the twenty two days after the Majin's revival.

"I would like to add two conditions on top of this. If you become unable to fulfill your promise, I will get your daughter's life. In other words, if you die before you kill one of the Heroes. Also, if you kill yourself after you are chosen as one of the Heroes that will not be considered fulfilling your promise."

The first half was a demand she could consent to. But the other one Mora thought was a strange proposal. If his objective were to kill one of the Heroes of the Six Flowers then shouldn't there not be any problems with Mora killing herself?

Mora had planned to kill Tgurneu by the deadline of their contract. And if she couldn't kill him by then she had intended to end her own life to save Sheniera. But now she was prevented from using that solution.

She could remain firm on that point, but if the negotiations broke off Sheniera's life would be lost.

"I shall accept that condition."

"...Have we reached an agreement?"

"There is one more thing I want to check. If you and I end up killing each other, what will happen?"

"At that time you would be victorious and your daughter will be released."

"If that's so, then good."

Mora beckoned Marmanna to use her power. If she didn't receive the Saint of Words' guarantee on the contract then the negotiations could not be finalized.

The ball of light Marmanna produced went into Tgurneu's body.

"Tgurneu pledges that when my life ends the parasite within Sheniera's body will also be made to die at the same time. Even when Mora and I end up killing one another the parasite will be made to die. If this contract is broken then I wouldn't care if my subordinate Kyoma all die."

"Tgurneu if you are going to offer lives other than your own as reparation then we must have their consent."

"Is that so? Well then, what should we do?"

"Through the power of the God of Words I will confirm the intentions of your underlings. I'll try asking them whether or not they will throw away their lives if you command it."

Marmanna closed her eyes and fell silent. Then after a while she opened them again and said, "Tgurneu's underlings have all declared that it wouldn't matter if they died if Tgurneu commanded it. The contract is valid."

Tgurneu's body glimmered, marking the completion of the first contract.

"I, Tgurneu pledge that when Mora kills one of the Heroes of the Six Flowers, I will make the parasite within Sheniera's chest die. If this contract is broken it is okay for me to die. However, if Mora commits suicide the contract will be considered invalid."

"Mora do you agree to these terms?"

"I agree to those terms," Mora said, completing another contract.

"I, Tgurneu pledge that until the 22nd day after the Majin's awakening passes no Kyoma will inflict harm upon Sheniera. If this pledge is broken then it would be okay for me to die."

"But in the case that Mora dies before the 22nd day after the Majin's awakening passes then this contract will become invalid."

"...I agree."

Tgurneu's body illuminated, signifying the finalization of all their contracts.

And with that their talks were finished. Mora had to kill Tgurneu before the 22nd day after the Majin's awakening passed. If she didn't then she would have to kill one of the Heroes of the Six Flowers. If she couldn't do either then Sheniera would die.

"Well, I'm going to head back to the Wailing Demon Territory. Farewell. We shall meet again."

Tgurneu stood and walked towards the entrance of the old castle. In that moment Mora kicked away her chair as she stood up and then lashed out at Tgurneu with her fists.

"Whoa!" Tgurneu said as he stopped Mora's lethal blow.

Mora then tried a follow up attack, but Tgurneu turned around and flew out from the window. She was going to follow him, but he soon slipped into the black of night and she could no longer see him.

"...Mora. This is unthinkable. Do you really intend on killing one of the Flowers?"

"Never. If I kill that Kyoma I will save my daughter. That is all."

Mora continued to stare into the dead of night. It was probably safe to say the negotiations had ended with a good result. She had been able to guarantee Sheniera's safety. And if she could kill Tgurneu she wouldn't have to end up killing one of the Heroes. And as a bonus her deal now prevented Tgurneu from lying to her.

But are things really okay? Mora wondered. She got the feeling Tgurneu was laying out even more traps.

#

There was probably no mistaking that the meaning of what Tgurneu had said to be anything other than she had two days left to save Sheniera. But what did that mean?

Mora pondered the answer as she climbed the mountain with Fremy.

When I made the contract with Tgurneu we had set the deadline to 22 days after The Majin's awakening. Today was just the 13th day. There should still be nine days left.

Words that were pledged to the Saint of Words, no matter what, could not be overturned.

Even if Marmanna had been colluding with Tgurneu the contents of the contract could not change. There were nine days left until the deadline. That was an unmistakable fact.

"...Tgurneu."

However, Tgurneu had pledged to Mora that if he lied to her he would lose his life. Tgurneu absolutely shouldn't be able to lie to her.

What could he possibly have meant that there were only two days left?

And how can I possibly kill him?



Chapter Three: Part One

Located within the eastern part of the Wailing Demon Territory, there was a small mountain at the western edge of the Valley of Spilled Blood. It had rugged, dangerous terrain and many caves and cliffs. However, it didn't have any particular name.

At the entrance of a cave halfway up the mountain a single strange flower bloomed. It was a flower small enough to fit in the palm of one's hand and it had six petals. At a glance it looked like an ordinary flower, but there was nowhere else in the world of nature where the same kind of flower bloomed. For a thousand years it had remained in a half-completed state, where it looked like it was going to fully open up, but never did, and likewise it seemed like it would close up, but never changed.

It was the flower that the Saint of the Single Flower had used as a weapon in the past.

A thousand years ago the Saint of the Single Flower underwent a struggle to the death with The Majin, exhausting all of her energy on the mountain. She'd suffered injuries all over her body and grew more and more fatigued until finally she reached her limit and collapsed. The Saint of the Single Flower was by no means omnipotent or invincible. She was a human that if injured would feel pain, and if tired would collapse.

Before she fell, the Saint of the Single Flower planted the single flower into the ground. The plant subsequently erected a barrier that kept the Majin and the Kyoma out for three days while she recovered from her injuries.

And even after the battle ended the barrier of the Saint of the Single Flower remained. To this day the Kyoma were prevented from getting near it.

And that was the history of the barrier of "The Eternal Flower."

#

Mora and the others were making their way to "The Eternal Flower Barrier". The flower was located within a cave halfway up the mountain with its barrier concentrated there. The barrier was a circle with a diameter of about 50 meters. And the inside of the barrier emitted a repulsive force that would repel the Kyoma or the Majin if they drew near.

"Can you enter it Fremy?" Mora asked when they were about to step into the barrier.

But as if it were no big deal at all, Fremy was able to pass through.

"I seem to be alright. I think it's thanks to the fact that I possess the crest of the Six Flowers, since in the past I wasn't able to get close."

"That's good. I would feel bad if everyone except for one person could enter."

Mora continued towards the cave entrance, moving closer to her other companions. The first person to come into view was Chamo. She was leaning on a boulder at the edge of the barrier, groaning in pain.

Mora walked over to her and asked, "Are you okay Chamo?"

Chamo had been vomiting, her nose was running, and tears were falling from her eyes. Her turbid vomit was mixed with the silver-colored powder from earlier. The Jyuma within her stomach were probably being rinsed of the silver powder clinging to them.

"Their wounds...Chamo can't heal all their wounds....What should Chamo do? This is the first time this kind of thing has happened," Chamo said then vomited again.

It was unfortunate, but there was nothing Mora could do to help her. Healing the wounds of the Jyuma was something that no one except for Chamo herself could do.

"Even the current most powerful Saint was less reliable than I thought," Fremy said from behind Mora.

"...What?!" Chamo said as she wiped her tears.

"It's a fact, isn't it? Until you figure out what to do about that silver powder you are no match for Tgurneu."

"...Guu!" Crying, Chamo hit the boulder she was resting on. "Shut up, shut up! Chamo is the strongest! When Chamo's wounded pets are healed that guy won' be able to do anything! Chamo will beat him into a bloody mess, rip him up, and eat him! Then Chamo will let him continue to live within Chamo's stomach without any hands or feet!"

This is terrifying, Mora thought. Chamo's power was tremendous. However, inversely proportional to her power was her immature mind. She was selfish, arrogant, and uncooperative. When she was in a superior position she was careless, and when she was in an inferior one she became flustered.

Mora's responsibility was to teach Chamo the vigilance of a mature warrior. It was Mora's fault that she hadn't been able to do that. But it was too late to regret it now.

"If you can manage to deal with that silver powder."

"Uuu!"

"Fremy! You're being a little cruel."

Goldof was standing a few distance away from their position. He had his back to Chamo and was just standing and staring out blankly into the distance. It seemed like he still haven't gotten over what had happened with Nashetania.

For a long time Mora believed that Goldof was the seventh. She had even thought his dumbfounded expression was most likely an act.

However, during their fight with Tgurneu Goldof hadn't done anything. He held the Kyoma reinforcements back alongside Chamo and Hans. And when they were escaping he ran to the cave carrying everyone's bags.

Mora was no longer sure if Goldof really was the seventh.

"Goldof, how's Adlet?" Fremy asked.

Goldof silently pointed to the cave. Mora and Fremy then lined up and headed towards the entrance.

"Fremy, you don't suspect Goldof, do you?" Mora asked quietly.

"Of course I suspect him. The same as you, Rolonia, Hans, and Chamo."

"Hans and Chamo..."

"I don't trust anyone other than Adlet." She declared quietly, but decisively.

"Is Adlet alright?" Mora called out into the cave.

Adlet was lying down on the ground with Hans and Rolonia beside him. A damp cloth had been placed on Adlet's forehead and Rolonia was using the power of fresh blood to treat his wounds.

There was a boulder about waist high within the cave. And on top of it a small flower was blooming. That was the center of the barrier, The Eternal Flower.

Thankfully there was also a spring gushing forth in the cave, so it seemed like water would not be a problem for them.

"You're alive? I was planning on going to meet up with you two," Hans said.

"We are fine. Now, how's Adlet?"

"He's okay. However, his skull is cracked, he isn't waking up and I can't heal him with my power," Rolonia said. She wielded the power of fresh blood and so she had the ability to heal gashes and internal bleeding, but her powers didn't extend to bones.

"I'll take over from here. I'll use the healing power of the mountains."

Mora sat down at Adlet's side. After absorbing the spirit of the mountain she sent it into Adlet's skull. She stimulated the natural human healing ability within him and the fracture in his skull started to heal.

"You can heal him?"

"Yeah, it's no problem."

Standing behind her, Fremy watched Mora silently. She probably suspected that Mora was only pretending to treat Adlet and was actually trying to kill him. She most likely intended to move her hand faster than the eye could see and shoot her rifle if Mora displayed any suspicious behavior.

"He's been seriously injured," Mora said, and her words made the air in the cave grow heavy. They had been beaten trying to attack Tgurneu head on. And to make matters worse, the enemy wasn't commanding his entire force. Under such circumstances, did they possibly have any chance of success?

"...If it had been six, perhaps we could have won," Hans said. Mora then looked over to him as he continued. "We'd fought while being cautious of each other the whole time. We didn't know when someone might betray us, or what kind of attack would come flying towards us from some unknown direction. There's no way we can fight at our full potential like that."

"Perhaps in our current condition we weren't able to display no more than sixty percent of our true strength, meow."

"...You're certainly right about that," Fremy said.

Mora wanted to say that a part of the reason why they lost was due to Fremy, but then Hans suddenly laughed.

"Meowhihi, we're in a giant pinch. It's fun, meow. I came to The Wailing Demon territory just to experience something like this."

Naturally Mora got angry. "What is so amusing, Hans?" she asked in a cutting tone.

"Meow? You're not having fun? Isn't this a precious little fix we've gotten ourselves into? Well, if you're not having fun, that's your loss."

Mora wanted to grab her head. She just couldn't understand him.

"Anyway, what did you try to do with Adlet? Thinking back on it, your seemingly reckless charge suddenly created many openings in Tgurneu's defense, and then you were able to hit him. What was the point of that?"

"Yeah...Ad-kun looked like he was somehow certain of his victory." Rolonia said.

"But Tgurneu was still very much alive after the attack," Mora replied while leaning her head to the side.

Hans then began to explain. "It seemed like Adlet was aiming for something big. So I backed him up and restrained Tgurneu. But I certainly never anticipated that things would end up like this, meow."

"In any case, after Adlet awakens let's hear the story from him."

"When will he wake up?" Fremy asked Mora.

Imbued with the spirit of the Mountains, Mora checked Adlet's condition.

"It's likely he'll awaken in several hours. His toughness is unworldly."

"...He's tedious," Fremy suddenly said, but the others didn't know what she meant and just looked at her.

"This is already the third time he has been close to death. I wonder how much we'll have to worry before he'll be satisfied," Fremy said, and then sighed.

"If you don't say it, meow, then he won't know that you're worrying about him, meow."

"An idiot like him wouldn't understand even if I did tell him. Plus I don't really want to talk right now."

As she treated Adlet, Mora recalled how only yesterday she had been ready to kill him.

At that time she had truly believed that Adlet had been the seventh. In retrospect that idea now seemed doubtful. Nevertheless, at that time she couldn't think of him as being anything other than the enemy.

All because when Adlet ran he had taken Fremy as hostage.

Using a hostage as a shield was something Mora couldn't forgive. It wasn't wrong that she would take any approach in order to win. But Mora thought there were some things that must not be done. And when Adlet had pierced Fremy's throat with his sword, it looked like his body had been superimposed over Tgurneu's image.

However, things were different now. Mora was sure that Adlet was more reliable than anyone else.

"Let's wait for Adlet to wake up. We'll talk after that. I believe this guy will undoubtedly come up with a plan to breakthrough this deadlock of ours."

To those words Rolonia gave a powerful nod. Hans shrugged, and Fremy, though Mora couldn't tell what she was thinking about from her face, just stared at Adlet.

#

Why? Within Adlet's slumbering consciousness that was the only thing he could think about.

In a place neither connected to dreams nor reality, Adlet was fighting with Tgurneu.

He launched smoke bombs trying to create an opening, but Tgurneu didn't care about the smoke. Adlet then threw poison darts, but none of them were effective. Next he threw bombs at Tgurneu's face, but even those were no good. After that Adlet leaped high up into the air and brought down his sword with all his might. However, Tgurneu easily knocked his body out of the air. Lastly Adlet stabbed him with the Nail of the Saints. Yet Adlet's final trump card also had no effect.

Why? Adlet thought. No Kyoma could withstand the Nail of the Saints. There shouldn't be, at least. And if the nail wasn't effective then Adlet was out of weapons and had no way of defeating Tgurneu.

"Hey Adlet," Tgurneu said, speaking to him as if they were friends. ***Are you seriously trying to kill me?***

Shouting, Adlet jumped up.

He was in a cave and to his side a flower was glowing faintly. It didn't take long for him to realize that it was the Eternal Flower and that his body was wrapped in bandages.

From that information Adlet was able to surmise that he was within the mountain of the Eternal Flower and that his companions had taken him along as they escaped from the battle.

"Ad-kun, are you awake?"

Rolonia was also in the cave, holding a damp cloth.

"Is everyone safe?"

"We're alright. All seven of us are here."

After hearing that, Adlet grabbed his sword from the ground and stood up. He didn't know who had brought it, but his metal box with his secret weapons stored inside was in the cave as well. He then took tools from the box and replenished the pouches on his waist.

"What's wrong?"

"I'm going to go fight Tgurneu again."

"Wait! You're injured."

"Isn't that the same as usual?"

The dream Adlet had had earlier was burned into his head. *If I can't fight, then I can't win.* That thought burned through his body, preventing him from just sitting still. So Adlet moved to exit the cave, but before he could Fremy stood in his way.

"Where are you going Adlet?" Fremy looked at Adlet with a calm gaze. Looking into her eye finally made him return to his senses.

"If you were the kind of fool that would go to fight now, then it would be better if you died."

"That's right. It was a bad idea. I'm sorry," Adlet said and sheathed his sword. Rolonia released a sigh of relief.

Adlet smiled; in times of pain, he had to smile.

"Everyone is taking it easy by eating, treating their wounds, or repairing their weapons and armor. It'd be good for you to do the same."

Then as if she were fed up with the situation, Fremy sighed. "You should also leave the thinking until later. You're still not in a sound state of mind, so it doesn't seem like you'll be able to come up with any good ideas."

"...Ugh." Adlet found it difficult to respond.

"You're quite the bothersome world's strongest."

Fremy moved past Adlet and walked into the cave. She then removed her cloak and took off her upper layer of clothes.

"Fremy what are you doing?!"

"I'm going to wash up with the water. I haven't bathed in days." Fremy said, and then with one hand still holding her rifle she proceeded to skillfully remove the rest of her clothing.

Adlet immediately rushed out of the cave.

The first thing he saw when he exited was Hans eating at the side of the cave entrance. His cheeks were stuffed with food as he dipped smoked meat and dried bread into some water.

"So you're awake, meow. How do you feel?"

"I'm alright. Well enough to want to go and kill Tgurneu right now."

"Stop with the stupid jokes and eat something, meow."

Hans shared his smoked meat with Adlet. The meat felt strangely soft, with a good fatty look and no strong smell. The wrapping was also a brand he remembered seeing once before.

"Hans, this isn't the food Nashetania had been carrying, right?"

"Meow. That Nashetania girl left her things when she ran. She ate good stuff, meow."

"..You should be worried about eating the food of the enemy."

"There aren't any idiots who would mix poison into my food." Hans said as he heartily devoured his food.

While Adlet stood puzzled, Rolonia exited the cave.

"If it's poison, then there's no need to worry. I came with all-purpose antidotes from Toulo-san...I mean, The Saint of Medicine. And I can also counteract poisons a little bit."

"...Sorry, but I have no interest in that. The strongest man in the world is careful." After he said that, Adlet took out a small portion of food from one of the pouches on his belts. It was a small cube with four centimeter sides.

"Meow, what is that? Is it good?"

"I call this the Food of the World's Strongest."

"As usual, your sense of what's cool is ridiculous, meow."

"It's refined wheat flour, the extract from the organs of some animals, and the fine powder of twelve medicinal herbs all mixed together and solidified with beef fat. Since I'm the strongest man in the world, I take one of these each day."

"But I don't think being the world's strongest has anything to do with food...."
Rolonia said, craning her neck to the side.

"...Is it good?"

Adlet stared at the small food in his hand for a while. Then he took several deep breaths to calm his heart.

"What are you doing?"

"There's a trick to eating this. First you expel all the memories of all the delicious foods you've had in your life from your mind."

He placed a finger to his forehead and followed his instructions.

"Then imagine that this is the most delicious food in the world. And if you succeed in deceiving yourself with that good feeling..."

He closed his eyes and stuffed the cube into his mouth. In a rush he chewed it up into finer pieces and then swallowed it in one gulp.

"Hell is waiting for you if you lose your strength for even a moment. It's downright the most intense of foods."

"...There's no other way to eat it, meow?" Hans was dumbfounded.

"Come to think of it, has everyone else eaten?" Adlet asked, now done eating and shifting the topic from the cube. The only people who had eaten were Hans and Adlet. Fremy was bathing in the spring, Goldof and Mora were keeping a lookout at the edge of the barrier, and Chamo was leaning on a rock with her eyes closed.

"Goldof ate something by himself. But all the girls haven't eaten yet. I don't know why."

"They don't eat?"

Rolonia then explained to the two of them. "Food isn't necessary for me. I can use the nutrients within my blood. Mora can exchange the energy of mountains for nourishment, so she doesn't need food either."

That's convenient, Adlet thought.

"What about Chamo?"

"Chamo-san...she probably doesn't need it for some reason. Sorry, I don't really know."

"You think Chamo needs ordinary food?" Chamo said from the rock she was leaning on

"...I don't know for sure, but that's my understanding."

"Chamo is taking care of her pets' injuries. Chamo doesn't want to talk," she replied, then once again closed her eyes.

From her stomach they could faintly hear the groans coming from her Jyuma. The sound made Adlet recall the Jyuma writhing in pain on the ground after being showered with the silver powder. Just as she said, it was probably better if they didn't disturb her for now.

"And Fremy...that's right. Fremy is half Kyoma, right?"

Adlet had learned about the Kyoma's manner of life from Atro. The Kyoma didn't need to eat everyday like humans. It would be enough for them to eat just once every ten days.

"...?"

Adlet sensed something out of place and twisted his neck to look away into the distance.

"What's wrong?"

Kyoma ate about once every ten days. So then why had Tgurneu been holding a fig fruit?

But without his suspicions leading to any conclusion the thought vanished from his mind.

#

Mora was standing at the edge of the barrier. She watched as Adlet exited the cave and leisurely began to eat. It relieved her to know that there was no need for her to worry.

Mora looked over the entire mountain as she surveyed the Kyoma's movements. As long as she was on a mountain she could use a type of second-sight ability. It allowed her to overlook not just the middle of the mountain she was on, but its entire surface.

At the moment there were about 200 Kyoma in the area around the Eternal Flower. The Kyoma that had pursued them had arranged themselves into groups of five and were scattered all over the mountain. Among them there seemed to be a multitude of high-class, intelligent Kyoma.

We're like rats caught in a trap, Mora thought. It was likely that Tgurneu intended to confine the Heroes of the Six Flowers on the mountain.

Next Mora checked whether any traps had been laid out for them. The Eternal Flower was without a doubt a place that the Heroes would visit. So the chance that there were traps laid near it were high. Besides the face of the mountain, she even searched within the ground, trying to find anything strange. But as far as Mora could see there were no traps on the mountain.

Tgurneu was not in the vicinity and it didn't seem like the Kyoma lurking on the mountain were taking orders from him. On top of that, she still didn't know what Tgurneu had meant by her having only two days left.

"..."

Mora was lost. She wondered if running had really been the correct choice, or if they should have killed Tgurneu by all possible means, even if Mora had to trade her life to do so.

No, that'd be a mistake, Mora corrected herself. Wrapping herself around Tgurneu and blowing herself up was a last resort, since if she failed Sheniera's life would also end at the same time.

"Mora, how are things?" Adlet asked, now finished eating.

"This place is completely surrounded, but we're not in any danger at the moment." Mora then suspended her surveillance and explained her second-sight to Adlet.

"Are you going to rest for a while? It seems like you've gone without rest for a long time, meow," Hans said.

"You're right. I'll rest for a bit then. I want to wash up too," Mora replied then made her way to the cave. However, she never stopped her second-sight and continued to vigilantly look over the surrounding area.

When she entered the cave, a naked Fremy was removing the soot clung to her hair. But when Fremy realized that Mora had entered she promptly grabbed her rifle which had been set down to the side.

"Calm down. I'm not going to do anything," Mora said.

She then took off her armor and robe and immersed herself in the cool spring. Dirt suddenly floated in the middle of the spring, but it was no problem since they'd already secured their drinking water. The pleasant coolness of the water permeated her entire body. And before she froze to the core, she got out and began to clean off the dirt from her body with her nails and palms.

"I'm grateful there's plenty of water. At least we don't have to worry about how we look."

Mora exhaled a long breath. No matter what kind of situation she was in, the time she spent cleansing her body was pleasant. Still, even when she thought about resting, Sheniera would not leave her mind.

"...Um, is it alright if I join you?" Rolonia asked as she entered the cave. She then started to take off her armor slowly.

"...The three of us bathing at once is careless. What will we do if something happens?" Fremy asked.

"It's no problem. You can fight naked, right? Being seen naked won't be the end of the world." Mora said as she scooped some water into her hand and rinsed the dirt from her body. "Rolonia, it was shocking to see you become like that so suddenly."

"Ye...yes. Really...I didn't know what I should do. Even now I can't believe that there is an imposter among the Heroes."

"I feel the same way. When you arrived I thought my heart had stopped," Mora said and then she laughed.

"I don't understand you either Rolonia," Fremy said suddenly.

Rolonia, still taking off her armor, jumped up in shock.

"Oh! What do you mean?"

"Even though at first you were even scared of a deer, when you encountered the enemy you started screaming and rampaging about. So which one of those personalities is the real you?"

Mora answered instead of Rolonia. "The timid and indecisive girl is the real Rolonia. The shouting and whatnot...that's like a ritual for her."

Fremy leaned her head to the side, as if she didn't understand.

"I want to ask one thing. Rolonia, who do you suspect?"

Rolonia faltered at those words. "I don't know. No one seems like an enemy."

Fremy stared at Rolonia. "If I were in your position, I would probably doubt myself first. I am the daughter of a Kyoma and I am the Six Flower Killer. I'm the person who killed your acquaintance Asley. And I am a warrior that had been raised by Tgurneu. So I wonder why despite all of that you aren't suspicious of me."

"Well, umm..."

"What trick are you playing, Rolonia?"

"Stop it Fremy," Mora interjected, unable to put up with the interrogation anymore. "Rolonia isn't up to anything. And she has never been good at doubting people in the first place."

"I wonder about that."

"Can't you be a little bit gentler? Or do you only want to be alone?" Mora asked.

Fremy looked away, pausing for a moment before saying, "...This is the only way I know how to interact with people."

"Fremy-san. I...", Rolonia began. "There was a time I had wondered whether you were the seventh. But since Ad-kun and Mora-san both trust you, I stopped doubting you."

"...I see."

"You and Ad-kun are close right?"

Without answering Rolonia's question, Fremy began putting on her clothes. Her slender body was wrapped in dark leather in an instant.

"Ad-kun, huh? You and him must be quite close," Fremy finally replied before grabbing her rifle and leaving the cave.

She's like a hedgehog, Mora thought. She was wary of anything that got close and so she was always afraid of something. If all she did was change her feeling of weakness into hostility then she would never be able to connect with others. Maybe she was really the timid one, not Rolonia.

Rolonia exhaled in relief, letting the tension leave her body. She then went back to removing her armor.

"It must be difficult for you too, Rolonia. It seems like you're fairly disliked."

"Yes. It seems that way." Rolonia laughed, though her face looked troubled.

"But, I'm also relieved. She seems to be a far nicer person that I had thought."

I wonder how she was able to draw that conclusion from their conversation.

"Which reminds me, I didn't know you and Adlet knew one another. It's a small world."

"Yes. For some reason I never got the chance to talk about Ad-kun."

"Hmm. Do you like him?"

Rolonia's hands stopped moving midway through taking off her armor. "Well, umm, I don't know."

Her response was amusing and without thinking Mora laughed.

"I don't think so. No, I probably don't. I don't think I like him or anything like that."

"I think that's for the best. Adlet is a reliable person, but he's an unbelievable fool. There would probably be no end to your hardships if you were to fall in love with him."

"Is that right? But it doesn't seem that way to me..."

Young people sure are carefree. Even in a situation like this they are free to be preoccupied with love affairs, Mora thought pleasantly.

But even now as Mora was gossiping with Rolonia, her daughter never left her mind for a second.

Chapter Three: Part Two

It was getting close to evening. Everyone had finished bathing and repairing their weapons and armor. Now the seven were sitting in a circle in front of the cave entrance, discussing their plan of action.

"Adlet, are you okay?" Mora asked. Sitting at the center, Adlet nodded. She had been quite surprised by his resilience. He didn't seem like a human of flesh and blood.

"More importantly, what has become of the situation? Is Tgurneu close by?"

Mora used her second-sight, but couldn't see any changes on the mountain.

"Tgurneu isn't here," Mora replied, making Adlet pause to think for a moment.

"There are two hundred Kyoma, huh? That's odd. That's only half of their forces. It's too few to trap us here."

"I fear there must also be Kyoma outside the mountain. So it's going to be difficult to win if we fight them head on."

"Even if we can't win, we'll still be able to run. As long as Tgurneu isn't here the amount of Kyoma on the mountain isn't something to be scared about," Adlet said.

"As long as Tgurneu isn't here, huh." Fremy stressed.

"First of all I want to ask one thing. Does anyone have any clue about the seventh's true identity? I don't need to hear who you are suspecting, or if there has been any suspicious behavior. What I want to know is, are there any definitive clues?"

Mora didn't have any. No one else answered either.

"Can you explain how you all got away from the battle? I was unconscious so I don't know."

Mora and Hans took turns explaining about the fight they had up until they reached the barrier. When they were finished, Adlet placed a hand on his forehead; a sullen look on his face.

"...I don't know. As far as I can tell, everyone except me had a chance to stop someone."

Mora nodded. If Fremy were the enemy then she would be dead.

"If Goldof or Rolonia had betrayed us it would have been intense, even for me, meow. Even if I had been able to successfully escape, I don't know if I would have been able to help Adlet and Chamo. And if Chamo were the enemy I would have been killed, meow."

"No, if Cat-san were the enemy then Chamo would be dead," Chamo said in return.

"Why isn't the seventh doing anything? What are they aiming for?"

Adlet was worrying about the same things Mora had been thinking about. But no matter how she thought about it, there was no denying that the seventh had missed multiple good opportunities.

"I had intended on killing the seventh even if I had to trade my life to do so, that is if I knew who they were," Fremy said.

"Huh?"

"I've been prepared to do that for a long time. And I haven't stopped trying to figure out who the seventh is. Maybe the seventh knows this. So there's a possibility that the seventh isn't moving, not because it's a part of their plan, but because they are afraid of me and can't make a move."

"But meow, I still think it's unnatural that they would overlook that opportunity. We would all be wiped out if the seventh had skillfully made their move," Hans said to which Mora agreed.

"There is another possibility," Fremy proposed. "Maybe Tgurneu ordered them not to move."

"Why?" Adlet asked.

"Because he's toying with us."

"Huh?"

"Tgurneu plays around a lot. For my entire life he's always been saying things that I couldn't understand. And he didn't care that his actions would put him at a disadvantage. So I don't know what he is thinking. Perhaps he's not thinking of anything at all."

That is certainly true, Mora thought. Tgurneu spoke in an overly friendly manner and had the attitude of a buffoon. His fighting tactics were also illogical. Clowning around was the only way one could describe it.

"In other words, are you saying he is simply just messing around? Or that he's not really trying to kill us?"

"...I don't know. Maybe he is pretending to play around in order to set some kind of trap. Or maybe he is truly just playing around."

If that were the case then was there no meaning in trying to guess Tgurneu's thoughts? He is a really difficult opponent to defeat, Mora thought.

"We were ambushed on that hill. Perhaps the seventh lead us there?" Mora then asked.

Adlet folded his arms across his chest and pondered her question.

"But Mora, you were the one who found that hill," Hans said.

"But I was the one who proposed that we talk there," Fremy added.

Then Rolonia timidly raised her hand. "Umm...I'm sorry, is it okay if I say something?" Adlet urged her on and Rolonia continued. "The seventh...they don't want their true identity to be exposed."

"What do you mean?"

"Well the seventh doesn't want others to know their true identity. And if that's the case then they won't do anything in order for their identity to remain a secret. So surely they don't want to be suspected."

"If you're right then why did the seventh come here? There's no point in them sneaking in among us if their intent was just to not do anything in order to keep their identity a secret," Fremy countered, discarding Rolonia's theory.

"No, I think Rolonia may be right on point," Adlet said and everyone's gaze turned his way. "This is purely a guess but...perhaps the seventh really isn't doing anything. They didn't lead us to that hill, and they aren't telling Tgurneu our movements."

"Why do you think that?"

"If we had continued along a safe route that protected us from surprise attacks then we would have almost certainly passed by that hill. Tgurneu had recognized that fact. So it was probably just by chance that Tgurneu appeared when we were resting on that hill. Since he could have attacked us even if we weren't resting, he was probably just hoping that he would appear behind us after we had passed."

"Why didn't the seventh do anything?"

"I guess the seventh had never intended to make a move during the battle. They just decided to stay at our side as our companion."

"What does that mean?"

"It means the seventh is looking for a chance to destroy us all. Even if they had attacked in the middle of the escape, a number of us would have probably slipped through their fingers. Killing just one or two of us most likely wouldn't be able to satisfy the seventh."

Everyone fell silent.

"The seventh probably will not make a move until the perfect opportunity arrives. And as long as they don't make a move, their identity will not be exposed. But like I said this is nothing more than a guess."

"...If that's the case, how should we expose the seventh's true identity?" Mora asked. "As long as the seventh doesn't make a move we won't be able to get any clues about who they are. But when the seventh does do something it will be when we're all in some desperate situation. What in the world should we do?"

Hans clapped his hands in what seemed to be excitement. "Meow, meow? This is terrible. By any chance have we been beaten, meow?"

"It's not just Tgurneu, this guy is screwing around too," Mora said unhappily.

Hans made a face as if to say he had no idea why she would say that. "No, I'm serious. But at the same time, isn't it boring to have to be serious when you're having fun, meow?"

Yeah, yeah, Mora thought.

Adlet continued, "As far as I've heard from Fremy's story, I think it's impossible for us to read Tgurneu's behavior since he doesn't use the best strategies to win. In the same way we also cannot predict what the seventh will do."

"Aren't you the strongest man in the world? You're going to give up that quickly?"

"We're completely surrounded. Adlet, how are we going to find our way out of this?" Mora asked.

"As soon as we run the situation will only get worse. We need a thorough plan," Fremy said.

As the companions all voiced their own ideas at the same time, Adlet quietly said, "There is only one way to get out of this situation."

"What's that?"

"To unravel the mystery of Tgurneu." Adlet's suggestion made everyone fall silent.

The mystery of Tgurneu? Mora had no idea what Adlet meant by that.

"Everyone look at this." Adlet took out a nail, about 22 inches long, from one of his pouches. It was the same as the nail that he'd stabbed into Tgurneu.

"Meow, what's that?"

Adlet explained about the so-called Nail of the Saints. He told them about how the tip of the nail had been fashioned with the crystallized poison distilled from the blood of Saints. And he explained how if a Kyoma were stabbed by it, the poison would course throughout their body in an instant.

As she listened to Adlet's explanation, Mora pondered how up until then she had recognized the so-called Atro Spyker as a warrior who was very knowledgeable about the Kyoma. But that seemed like a gross misunderstanding. She had never heard of anyone even consider converting the blood of a Saint into a weapon, much less extracting the poison from their blood.

"You...stabbed that into Tgurneu? Were you really able to do it?" Mora asked and Adlet nodded definitively.

"I definitely stabbed the nail into Tgurneu's side. And I also confirmed that the poison had circulated through his entire body. And yet, Tgurneu is still alive."

I can't believe that, Mora thought. Rolonia and Fremy too both turned pale.

"Why didn't it work? If I understand what you said correctly, it should have been the breakthrough we needed to defeat Tgurneu."

"Meow. That's a serious problem, meow," Hans said.

Chamo too had a face that seemed to indicate that she didn't quite understand the importance of what was being said. It was as if she couldn't understand just how impossible a phenomenon it was for the blood of a Saint not to work on a Kyoma.

"I'm no expert, but there are various kinds of Kyoma, and each kind has a different ability right? If so, then Tgurneu is a Kyoma that is strong against poison."

"...So you don't get it. Well, let me explain a bit more clearly," Adlet said with a sigh.

"The Kyoma are life forms that evolve freely through their own volition. I'm thinking you have seen a lot of Kyoma, but regardless of what type they are there is one thing that they all have."

"Meow."

"If they wish to grow a horn then they will grow one. If they wish to grow bigger than they can become so. Their evolution can take several dozen years or several hundred years.

And occasionally there are even times when their evolution has failed. But fundamentally, as long as the Kyoma has a will then they can acquire any kind of ability."

"Really, meow? Then is it possible for them to acquire the ability to render a Saint's poison ineffective?"

Fremy continued the explanation where Adlet left off. "But there are exceptions. There are still things that are impossible, no matter how much they wish it. And one of those is to make their core evolve."

"Core?"

Fremy explained that the core was the part of the Kyoma that contained its brain. It was somewhere within each Kyoma's body and it was their weakest point.

"The core is the true form of the Kyoma. You could call the rest of a Kyoma's body a mere appendage. So even if a Kyoma could make their physical body evolve, they could not evolve their core. And the blood of a Saint would destroy it."

Hans and Chamo both looked like they hadn't quite followed what Fremy had said.

"The poison contained in the blood of the Saints is derived from the power of the gods, a characteristic that is different from other poisons.

And once the poison from the Saint's blood enters a Kyoma, its toxins will reach that Kyoma's core instantaneously. No matter how the physical body was evolved, the Kyoma cannot protect itself against that. And after the core has been invaded by the poison it would be absolutely impossible to counteract."

"So..."

"The blood of Saints is a poison that is effective against all Kyoma without exception."

"...Meow? It's that incredible?" Hans asked, finally realizing the blood's power.

"Even I use techniques that can insert a Saint's blood into a Kyoma's body," Rolonia said. "Atro-san told me that those skills would absolutely work on the Kyoma."

"Adlet. Who is this Atro Spyker? How did he come to acquire these techniques?" Mora asked.

Adlet leaned his head to the side. "I'm sorry, but I don't know. My master was the type of person who almost never talked about the past."

"Chamo couldn't care less about such a strange weapon. Chamo doesn't even know this Atro," Chamo said in a bored tone. "Chamo more or less gets that it is incredible. But it didn't work on Tgurneu right?"

Well then it's not needed anymore. Chamo will kill Tgurneu. Chamo will rip his entire body to shreds and eat him. Chamo will then make him into a snack for the pets in Chamo's stomach."

"Don't you get it Chamo? An attack that should have definitely worked didn't," Adlet said.

"And what of it?"

"If your Jyuma rip him apart, will Tgurneu die? Will he die, if Rolonia forces out all his blood? How about if Goldof or Hans slice him apart, or if Mora pummels him over and over, or if Fremy shoots him full of holes, will Tgurneu die? We have no proof that any of that will work."

"Chamo doesn't know. Chamo's just going to beat him to a pulp."

"We have to definitively finish Tgurneu off. And in order to find a way to do that we need to solve the mystery regarding his body."

As Adlet hounded Chamo for answers, Mora thought, *This is bad. Chamo's mood is getting worse and she might get violent.*

"...Well, what should we do then?"

However, contrary to Mora's expectations Chamo reluctantly backed down.

"I will unravel the mystery surrounding Tgurneu and find a way to kill him. As for you, think about a way to beat him. In particular, a method to defend against that silver powder."

"Got it. For the time being, Chamo will try to act after thinking."

Chamo's obedient attitude surprised Mora quite a bit. Even Chamo was maturing. Sure it was only a little, but she was definitely maturing.

"But that still won't settle anything. Even if you solve Tgurneu's mystery, we still don't know the identity of the seventh," Fremy said.

"I think if we drive Tgurneu into a corner, the seventh will also give themselves away."

"What do you mean?"

"Most likely the seventh and Tgurneu are connected. At the very least there doesn't seem to be any doubt that they are our enemy and allies with the Kyoma. So it should be a major blow for the seventh if we kill Tgurneu. Which is why I think that if it looks like Tgurneu will lose then the seventh will move to protect him."

"I see. So instead of waiting for the seventh to make a move we are going to create a situation where they have no choice but to take action," Mora said.

"What should we do if we corner Tgurneu but the seventh doesn't make a move?"

"Then we will kill Tgurneu. I'd rather defeat him instead of discovering who the seventh is, as it would be a far greater victory."

"It would be even better if we could do both, meow," Hans said with a nod.

"All of these feel so dangerous. I wish we knew what Tgurneu or the seventh was going to do," Rolonia said.

"I was taught by my master that the worst thing one could do was to play it safe and to do things half-halfheartedly. He told me that occasionally he would encounter situations like that. And from his experience jumping directly into danger is actually less dangerous. So we will defeat Tgurneu with everything we've got. That is the best course of action for us at the moment."

Rolonia looked even more unsettled after hearing that.

"Relax. I am the strongest man in the world."

"You're saying that again, meow?" Hans said, as if sick of hearing the phrase.

"I understand what he means and I believe it. Ad-kun is the strongest man in the world." Rolonia agreed with a nod.

It looked like everyone agreed with Adlet's plan and Mora was grateful that Adlet had decided to defeat Tgurneu at any cost. Defeating Tgurneu was the only way she could help her daughter.

Tgurneu absolutely had to be killed.

"I have one suggestion," Mora said, raising her hand.

"What is it?"

"I have a secret plan. It is a technique I prepared for years specifically for the day I would kill Tgurneu. And I think now is the time to use it. What do you think?"

"What kind of technique is it?"

"I will cover the entire mountain with an instant barrier and it will trap Tgurneu within the mountain area. Besides cutting him off from reinforcements, it will also prevent him from escaping. I can only do it once, but it should be worth trying."

Rolonia's eyes widened as she heard Mora's plan.

"Please wait a moment, Mora-san. That barrier is dangerous."

"I'm willing to take the risk. Adlet would probably have said the same thing."

Unable to rebuke her statement, Rolonia fell silent.

"Is this barrier something you can hold for a long time?"

"No, just six hours at the most. However, it should be enough time to kill Tgurneu."

"I understand. Do it," Adlet said without hesitation.

"The next time Tgurneu shows himself I can set it up immediately. So Adlet, you should decide when the barrier will be activated."

Adlet nodded.

"Alright, we've decided on a plan of action. I will solve Tgurneu's mystery. And when I have found out why the Nail of the Saints didn't work, I'll be able to discover a way to kill him. Fremy will help me."

"...Understood."

"Hans and Goldof, you two will get rid of the Kyoma on the mountain. We need you to reduce their numbers a bit for us. Can you do that?"

"Of course, meow. Just me would be plenty for this." Hans laughed and though Goldof didn't respond, it seemed like he had agreed to the request.

"Mora, use your second-sight ability to keep a lookout over the whole mountain. If there is anything strange tell us immediately. Also, assist Hans and Goldof."

"I understand."

"Chamo, you will work on a way to counteract the silver powder. If I am not able to solve Tgurneu's mystery then you and your Jyuma will become our main forces. Don't screw up."

"Of course. And the same goes for you."

"Umm...what about me?" Rolonia raised her hand but Adlet hesitated about how to respond.

"Rolonia is the Saint of Fresh Blood. She should be a specialist when it comes to blood. I think she will be useful," Mora said and Adlet nodded.

Since it seemed like his instructions were over, his companions started to move. However, Adlet called for them to stop.

"There's one last thing I want to say beforehand. It's to the seventh among us." Adlet then looked over his companions and continued, "If you want to defeat us, then first think of a way to kill me. There'll be no turning back if you can't kill me quickly."

No one responded; the entire area seemed to be silent.

"If you're thinking about saying your signature phrase, don't. It's so not cool." Chamo was quite right in her prediction.

Then unconsciously Mora and Hans burst out laughing. Rolonia looked down to the ground and covered her mouth and Fremy turned away. Even Goldof seemed to be smiling a bit.

This is the first time we've all laughed together, Mora thought. And for a short time she felt that maybe a union had formed between them.

Adlet was quite the person. He allowed himself to be made a clown just so that he could calm down his anxious companions.

#

After everyone split up, Adlet went back into the cave. He pressed his back against the wall and slid down to the floor. Chamo had humiliated him and he could feel that his face was red with embarrassment.

Shit, I am the strongest man in the world, he swore to himself.

Fremy and Rolonia then entered the cave and sat apart from one another, their eyes never meeting. Fremy had a blank expression on her face while Rolonia looked terribly uneasy.

"It can't be helped that the two of you are cautious of each another, but please get along. If we don't cooperate we won't be able to solve Tgurneu's mystery."

"Right, you're right. Fremy-san, let's work well together. [1]"

"Right. For the time being let's cooperate," Fremy replied, but it didn't seem like the distance between them had shrunk at all.

"I'll make some light." Fremy moved to the center of the dark cave and placed a gem on the ground. She recited an incantation and the stone began to emit light.

"What is that? Is that your power, Fremy?"

¹ よろしく願います A Japanese idea that doesn't quite exist in English. A literal translation would be "Please treat me well," however the meaning is more along the lines of "I look forward to working/learning with you."

"No, it's something Mora brought with her. She said it was made by the Saint of Light, Pippy. I have a lot more, so I'll hand you some."

Adlet received the gem and Fremy told him the incantation. After, the three then made a circle around the small illuminated stone.

"...I'm sorry, but Adlet..." Fremy started. "It honestly doesn't seem like we'll be able to solve this mystery. We know too little about Tgurneu. We merely fought him for about thirty minutes."

"Why are you saying that? You should know Tgurneu much more than we do."

"Sorry, but don't expect much from me," Fremy said as she shook her head. "I don't know Tgurneu's weak point. And I've never come across a reason why the Nail of the Saints wouldn't work on him. From the beginning Tgurneu had intended to kill me, so there was no reason to tell me any important information."

I don't get it, Adlet thought. "Didn't you feel that Tgurneu was hiding something?"

"...No."

"That's crucial. Tgurneu intended on killing you so he didn't tell you any important information. That is how we can crack this puzzle."

"What do you mean?"

"To hide something from those near you is quite a lot of work. And to keep it from being exposed at all is even more difficult. Lying, averting your eyes when you hear the truth, and pretending to act natural would all be things he'd have to do. Without a doubt he must have left some kind of trace behind," Adlet said, as he stared right into Fremy's eye.

"If we are able to find out whatever lies he has told then it won't be difficult for us to arrive at the truth."

"Even so, we don't have enough information," Fremy countered, just before Rolonia timidly cut into their conversation.

"Umm, well Ad-kun, can you lend me your sword?"

Adlet didn't know why she wanted it, but he handed over his scabbard anyway. Rolonia then drew the sword and looked at the blade.

"Ah, did you repair it? Well, do you still have the cloth you used to wipe it with?"

Adlet retrieved an old rag from the trash he had discarded at the entrance of the cave. Rolonia took the cloth then stuffed it into her mouth.

"Hey!"

"...That's disgusting."

Fremy and Adlet scrunched up their faces in disgust, while Rolonia, looking embarrassed, continued to suck on the blood-soaked cloth.

"This sword cut six Kyoma." Rolonia pulled out the cloth and took out her own whip. In the same way as the cloth, she licked it. "And this whip hit nineteen Kyoma. There is only one kind among them that tastes the same as one of the bloods on Adlet's sword. So from this I have determined Tgurneu's blood. Now please wait a moment. I'm going to analyze it in more detail."

Rolonia alternately licked the cloth and her whip. Somehow it seemed she was examining Tgurneu's blood that was clinging to each.

"So, what have you learned?" Fremy asked.

"The blood can tell me a lot of things, from what he ate, the characteristics of his body, to his history up till now. So if I lick his blood I can get a general understanding of those things."

Rolonia continued to lick the two objects for a while, and when she finished with that she closed her eyes in thought.

"...I got it."

"What?"

"First of all Tgurneu is a Kyoma composed of a mix of others. He took the parts of other Kyoma to make himself stronger. His base form is a lizard Kyoma. However, the lizard form is just his base and it seems like his strength comes from all the other Kyoma parts."

"That is significant information...but I already knew that," Fremy said.

"He has blended his body with eight Kyoma. First of all he combined with a giant ape Kyoma to gain his physical strength. He then combined with an octopus Kyoma to acquire the ability to elongate and shorten his arms. He got his eyesight from a crow Kyoma and his sharp hearing and sense of smell from mixing with a dog Kyoma. And a swan Kyoma brought about his agility..."

Rolonia closed her eyes again for a moment and continued to study Tgurneu's blood. "...This is incredible. He absorbed a primitive, hermaphroditic Kyoma and acquired unthinkable regenerative power. And an increase in his stamina and the strengthening of his body's restoration abilities came from a snake Kyoma."

Adlet and Fremy sat wide-eyed as they were showered with all the details of Rolonia's explanation.

"I didn't know that much. I just knew he was the kind of Kyoma composed of other Kyoma."

"How did you learn this skill?" Adlet asked.

Bashfully, Rolonia looked down to the ground. "Well...I received training in how to analyze blood through licking it from Mora-san. She taught me various useful things like healing and antidotes. And after I was taught by Atro-san about the ecology and living habits of the Kyoma I wondered if I could put all that knowledge to practical use..."

Fremy then looked Adlet's way and said, "Adlet, did you know about this ability of hers?"

"No, this is the first I've heard of it. Rolonia is full of nothing but surprising things," Adlet said and Rolonia happily smiled.

Chapter Three: Part Three

After Adlet, Fremy, and Rolonia went into the cave, Hans and Goldof left the Eternal Flower to kill a band of Kyoma. Still at the cave, Mora was observing the two of them with her second-sight and watched as the group of Kyoma quickly reacted to Hans and Goldof as they commenced their attack.

"Meo-meow. Goldof, you take care of the small ones. I'll finish off the biggest one." Mora could hear Hans' voice. Her second-sight wasn't limited to sight but could pick up sounds as well.

The sun had already finished setting and the faint red light that had been on the edge of the mountain had disappeared. The light from the stars and moon illuminated Mora and the others as they entered their first night within the Wailing Demon Territory.

It's a noisy night, Mora thought. She looked over the mountain with her second-sight and saw a great number of Kyoma. They had heard Hans and Goldof's battle and were heading over to their position one after another.

"Hans, five are nearing from the east and ten from the south," Mora said, using the power of mountain echoes, but adjusting it so that it would resonate only in the air where Hans was. That way the Kyoma couldn't hear her voice.

"Goldof, after you deal with those, run north at once. It'll be bad if you're surrounded."

In the blink of an eye the group of Kyoma was dead and Hans and Goldof were already on the move. *If things remain like this then it doesn't seem like I'll have to worry*, Mora thought as she continued to look over the mountain.

Suddenly her eyes moved to the side. Chamo thrust her foxtail grass down her throat and vomited out several Jyuma.

"What are you planning to do, Chamo?"

"Chamo doesn't need Oba-chan's help. Chamo can do this alone."

Mora watched as the Jyuma left the barrier of the Eternal Flower. But as soon as she thought the Jyuma intended to fight with the Kyoma, the Jyuma dragged out a cave rabbit from its nesting hole. One by one they captured squirrels and wild mice then carried them in their mouths back to Chamo.

"Alright! You're all such good children," Chamo said as she petted the heads of the returning Jyuma. Then she bit into the wild animals. With the area around her mouth dyed a deep red, she swallowed each animal and added them to the contents of her stomach.

"...I don't get it."

Whatever she intended to do, Mora didn't know. But it was probably a line of thinking only Chamo would understand, so Mora decided to leave her alone.

Meanwhile the news that Hans and Goldof had begun fighting seemed to be spreading to the other Kyoma. The mountain became busy with activity and she could hear the voices of the Kyoma that could speak.

"They started to move."

"...Do they plan on escaping?"

"No, only two are moving."

There was a chance that Mora could understand the enemy's strategy from hearing them speak, so she remained alert and strained to hear what they were saying. Many things could happen, so she couldn't afford to be careless even once through the course of the night.

"Even so, what about Tgurneu?" Mora said to herself.

Over and over again she looked over the mountain with her second-sight. However, Tgurneu was nowhere to be found. There were even no signs which showed that the Kyoma were relying on his commands.

Where in the world are you? And what are you doing?

"Don't let them escape."

"There are only two enemies. Just Hans and Goldof."

Tgurneu's name never came out of the Kyoma's mouths.

It was unthinkable that under these circumstances there weren't any traps laid out for them. Tgurneu was definitely going to take action. Perhaps he was just finishing the preparations for his attack.

Then Rolonia came up to Mora's side.

"Mora-san. Excuse me for a moment," Rolonia said, then she grabbed Mora's armored fist and licked it multiple times.

Her sudden arrival shocked Mora, but after a while Rolonia stopped and said, "I got it!" Then she returned to the cave.

What are they doing over there? Mora thought as she leaned her head to the side.

#

"What's up?" Adlet asked as Rolonia made it back to the cave.

"Mora-san's armored glove also has a bit of Tgurneu's blood smeared to it."

"What have you learned?" Fremy asked.

"Tgurneu's blood contains the blood of a Saint. That's as clear as I could determine from just licking it."

"I see..."

So the poison had circulated through his body after all. The possibility that the Nail of the Saints was flawed had finally vanished.

"Rolonia. Can you also detect the composition of Tgurneu's body from the taste of his blood?"

"Yes, for the most part."

"Is there a core within his body?"

"Yes. After analyzing his blood I'm sure of that fact."

"How many?"

"Just one."

Adlet frowned.

"Unfortunately, I don't know why the blood of the Saints didn't work...Ad-kun, I'm sorry. I tried to work harder, but..."

Rolonia's shoulders dropped.

"What are you saying? There's only a bit more left until we solve this mystery. There's no reason the strongest man in the world can't solve this with only the information we've managed to gather."

Of course it was just a bluff. In actuality, Adlet was worried. He was grateful for Rolonia's analysis, but he still couldn't find an answer.

Adlet had come up with a bunch of theories. For example, there was a kind of Kyoma called the division type. They could separate their bodies and create another self. If Tgurneu were such a Kyoma he could divide his body into two or more parts. Then he could hide his main body that housed his core somewhere and attack with the body that didn't have the core. Such a theory would explain why the blood of the Saints hadn't worked on him. If there was no core within his body then obviously the poison of the Saint's blood could not affect it.

However, Rolonia's analysis had negated that possibility. Tgurneu's body had a core. And on top of that Tgurneu was not a division Kyoma.

From the beginning it had been an unreasonable theory. The other bodies created by the division Kyoma were only creatures on the level of lower order animals or parasites. It was highly unlikely that there would be another body that possessed strength like Tgurneu's.

Or there was another theory: Tgurneu was composed of multiple, living Kyoma and had been pretending to be just one. His head, core, arms, legs... each part was a different, independent Kyoma. And so only one of those Kyoma had been killed by the Nail of the Saints. The head and the other parts continued to live.

But that theory also contradicted with Rolonia's analysis. Tgurneu was a composition type Kyoma and there was only one core within his body. So Adlet had no choice but to discard that theory as well.

He also had another idea, which was that Rolonia's analysis had been wrong. But it didn't seem like the timid and meticulous girl would say something she wasn't sure about, so he could trust her analysis.

"Both him being a division Kyoma and him being composed of separate Kyoma have been disproved Adlet. Have you thought of anything else?" Fremy asked. It seemed like she had also been thinking about the same theories.

Adlet shook his head.

"I'm understanding this less and less. Supposing Rolonia's analysis is correct, then that means Tgurneu does not have the ability to hide things," Fremy added.

"I'm...I'm sorry," Rolonia said.

You don't really need to apologize, Adlet thought.

"Rolonia, I'd like you to step outside for a bit."

"Huh?"

Fremy's sudden request confused Rolonia and Adlet.

"Quickly."

"Oh, okay. I'm leaving now. I'm sorry," Rolonia said and swiftly exited the cave.

Fremy watched her leave and continued to look out the cave to confirm that she couldn't hear her anymore.

"What's with you all of a sudden, Fremy?"

"Do you believe what Rolonia is saying?" Fremy was staring at Adlet.

"Of course. She is the key to investigating Tgurneu."

"The seventh will act to protect Tgurneu. You were the one who guessed that. Maybe Rolonia is trying to lead you in the wrong direction."

"There's no reason to think that's the case."

"I'm just talking about the possibility."

"I will consider the possibility. However, until it is clear that Rolonia is the enemy you will trust her."

"You're so careless," Fremy shouted. She then saw Rolonia peeking into the cave from the outside so Fremy gestured for her to go away. "Be a bit more cautious. And be wary of the others as well. Sooner or later you'll be tricked and killed if you stay like this."

"If the seventh is coming after me then that is exactly what they would want me to do. I am the strongest man in the world."

Anger and a bit of sadness spread across Fremy's face. But Adlet had no idea what she was thinking about.

"You are not the world's strongest."

"...What did you say?"

"You're even weaker than me. No, you are the weakest among the seven. Throw away your high opinion of yourself and know your place."

He himself had to believe he was the world's strongest. That was Adlet's conviction. If he stopped believing in himself then he would no longer be Adlet.

"I am the strongest man in the world. I will absolutely defeat the Majin. I am not scared of the seventh. You, the others, everyone. I will protect you all."

Fremy didn't say anything. She just shook her head sadly.

"I also have something I want to say to you. Believe in your companions a bit more. It's like other than me you think of everyone as the enemy," Adlet continued.

"...That's right. I think our companions are the enemy. Shouldn't I think that way since I don't know who the enemy is?"

"You are wrong. We must trust one another. If we don't cooperate, we won't be able to defeat The Majin. If we lose our unity that will only give the seventh an advantage."

Fremy didn't nod; she just continued to stare at him.

"...I refuse. I have had enough of trust."

"You..."

"I want to kill everyone except for you, if you'll permit it. If I can do that then I'll stop thinking about the seventh."

"Fremy!"

When they had finished fighting with Nashetania, Adlet had thought their hearts had been able to connect. But, maybe that had been an illusion. At the moment Adlet could feel a giant gap between the two of them.

If they understood one another they would trust one another. But that was the one thing that couldn't be done, no matter what. And it seemed like that would always be the case. Whenever Fremy was there Adlet's chest began to hurt.

"Rolonia, it's alright for you to come back now. Let's think more about Tgurneu," Adlet called out to Rolonia in an irritated tone.

"What's wrong? You seem like you're in a really bad mood."

"...It wasn't an important conversation. It was an unproductive and meaningless waste of time."

Fremy's face didn't react to those words. She only looked away and silently stared at the ground.

The three then resumed their conversation.

"Rolonia, does Tgurneu really not have a hiding ability or something like that?" Adlet asked.

"...Yes, I'm very sure about that. Tgurneu doesn't have a hiding ability. If he did I should be able to detect it through licking his blood."

"In other words, the abilities Tgurneu has are..."

"His incredible strength, vitality, regeneration, and his flexible and resilient body. That's all."

If that were the case then Tgurneu didn't have an ability that could render the blood of a Saint ineffective.

"I wonder if what made the poison ineffective wasn't Tgurneu's own power. Maybe some other person used some kind of power to protect Tgurneu. Should we consider that?" Adlet asked.

"But the only person present there was Tgurneu."

"That's not necessarily the case. There may have been someone hidden within the ground. Another Kyoma...or a Saint."

"A Saint?" Rolonia said, shocked.

"Of course we should consider that. Nashetania had betrayed us. There is enough of a possibility that there are other traitorous Saints."

"That may be so, but..."

Fremy sighed. "Isn't governing the Saints Mora's job? I wonder what happened to her supervision."

"It...It's not Mora-san's fault..."

"I'm not trying to blame her. It's just a complaint."

Fremy's cold words made Rolonia slump her shoulders.

"It might be my fault."

"Why?"

"Mora-san had been seeing to my instruction for so long. Even Mora-san had been making great efforts to become stronger...While she was training me she had to leave the governing of the Saints to other people. If I had been more capable..."

"You always want to say that anything and everything is your fault. I want you to stop; it's tiresome."

"I'm...I'm sorry." Rolonia shrank down even further.

After that they continued to talk for a while. The three put forward various ideas concerning what kind of ability could make the poison of the Saints ineffective. Adlet put to use all the knowledge about the Kyoma he had learned from Atro. Fremy also said the names and abilities of the Kyoma she knew. And Rolonia used her limited knowledge on the matter and thought about the abilities of the Saints.

Yet they couldn't come up with any solutions. Each possibility was disproved one after another. They simply couldn't see an answer as to why the poison of the Saints hadn't worked on Tgurneu.

#

The battle between Hans, Goldof, and the Kyoma continued. Mora was watching their fight with her second-sight and from what she could tell Hans and Goldof had probably managed to reduce the Kyoma by twenty.

"Goldof headed over there!"

"Hans, die, die, we will eat you," the Kyoma said as they tried to surround Hans.

As she listened to the Kyoma, Mora issued directions to Hans with the power of mountain echoes.

"Hans, you'll be surrounded if you stay there. Once you head to the summit of the mountain, turn to the west."

"Umeomeow! Goldof we're getting out of here! Follow me, meow!"

The two cut down the Kyoma in their path as they made their escape.

Looking at Hans' strength was fascinating. Excluding Chamo, he seemed to be the one in the group most likely missing something in the head. But what was more surprising than his strength was the accuracy of his analysis of situations.

Although he had Mora's support, it should have been almost impossible for them to continue the fight without being surrounded. Yet despite the fact that it was the dead of night and they couldn't make any light, he was having no trouble.

Goldof was also strong. He followed Hans' instructions and was fighting comfortably. As long as it was related to battle there didn't seem to be any reason to worry about him.

"Goldof, tell me if you're tired, meow. Can you still fight?"

Goldof didn't even shake his head. He was gloomy and depressed as expected.

"Hans, after the situation there settles down can you check outside the mountain for me? My second-sight only extends to the mountain."

"Meow."

Hans and Goldof headed towards the summit and from there they looked over the base of the mountain.

"I can't see any lights, meow. There's no sign of a large group approaching."

"Is that right? Well I understand. Continue the battle then."

Mora was panicking. She still couldn't see Tgurneu and as a result couldn't use the barrier she'd designed to trap him.

What in the hell are you doing, Mora cursed at Tgurneu within her mind.

Tgurneu, the seventh, why aren't they making a move? And what did Tgurneu mean by having only two days left? Her questions floated within her head one by one, but not even the slightest answer came to mind.

"..."

Mora did have one fear. It was a fear that had been dwelling within her mind ever since they were trapped within the Illusion Fog Barrier.

Did the seventh know about the secret pact between me and Tgurneu? Surely Tgurneu had said that he wouldn't speak about the pact to anyone else. But if there was someone who had overheard our conversation, that would be another matter altogether.

Although there were conditions to the agreement, Mora had indeed promised to kill one of her companions. If that were to be exposed her companions would probably direct their suspicion at her. Fremy might try to kill her on the spot. And even if she wasn't killed immediately no one would trust her anymore.

On top of that, Mora already messed up during their time in the Illusion Fog Barrier. She already lost a considerable amount of her companions' trust. For the seventh her predicament must be an opportune situation.

However, there was no indication that her secret pact with Tgurneu had been revealed. Excluding Fremy, there was no one who strongly suspected her.

The seventh and Tgurneu, what are you aiming at?

"Mora, which way should we go? Are you sleeping?" Hans said from the summit of the mountain.

Mora hurriedly stopping her current line of thinking. Then after using her second-sight to survey the area she gave out directions.

"Once you descend the mountain, go around the south side. There are only a few Kyoma around there."

"Alright, meow."

At that moment there was a small flash of an idea within the back of her mind. However, Mora immediately denied it.

It can't be. There's no way I am the seventh.

#

They talked for maybe two hours, but the words the three of them were saying were getting fewer and fewer.

They had thoroughly discussed every likely possibility as to what kind of ability could have been used to block the poison of the Saints coursing throughout Tgurneu's entire body

They thought for a long time about what Tgurneu might have been hiding from Fremy. But even the information Fremy supplied them with was not enough to help them pin down what exactly Tgurneu was concealing.

Adlet, Fremy, and Rolonia stared at one another as they contemplated the gloom of their situation.

"...Maybe we should change up how we think," Adlet said, fed up with the conversation going around in circles and leading nowhere.

"How should we change it?"

"We shouldn't think about what kind of ability blocked the Saint's poison. Instead we should discuss if there has been anything unusual about Tgurneu's behavior."

Fremy and Rolonia barely reacted to his suggestion.

"There has been nothing but unusual behavior. He came up from out of the ground, he said that greetings were some kind of first step, he had an underhanded way of speaking... "

That was all certainly true.

"Fremy, has Tgurneu always been that way?"

"Yes. Greetings are the first step to a bright living. He's been saying that for a long time. If Tgurneu's Kyoma don't greet, he will get angry."

What's the deal with him, Adlet thought.

"What was the mouth in his chest? Is that a compartment or something?"

"That's right. He places various things in there."

"Like what?"

"What he puts in there the most are memo pads and writing utensils, compasses and maps...He has even put in human-made toys and sweets," Fremy answered.

"For some reason he is only putting ordinary things there," Rolonia said.

That was when Adlet recalled a particularly strange thing among Tgurneu's unnatural behavior.

"Tgurneu...why did he have a fig fruit?"

"Huh?"

"Isn't it alright for the Kyoma to almost never eat? Why then is he walking around with food?"

"Tgurneu is a Kyoma that strangely eats frequently. He has said that he is more predisposed than ordinary Kyoma to getting hungry."

"Is that right, Rolonia?"

"...Predisposed to eat frequently? I don't know much about that..."

Adlet recalled something else. This time it was from eight years ago when Tgurneu appeared at his village. Tgurneu had been talking with the villagers at a table. And at that time as well there was a large amount of food in front of him. *But why?*

"There might be some secret to that fig."

"The fig?"

"What does Tgurneu normally eat?"

"He eats anything. Humans and animals, vegetables and fruit. He eats fruit a lot in particular. He makes his captured humans grow them and he puts them in the mouth in his chest and walks around with them.

"...Did he eat the fruit?"

"From what I could grasp from licking his blood, Tgurneu truly eats anything," Rolonia answered.

"He has eaten fig fruit, and the meat of animals, and weeds. And..." Rolonia hesitated in the middle of her sentence. "He has eaten Kyoma too."

Adlet was shocked, but Fremy remained calm.

"That's right. Tgurneu eats Kyoma. He has eaten useless insignificant ones and Kyoma that are suspected to be Dozzu's followers. He said it was good for gaining strength."

"He even ate Kyoma from his own group...that's sickening."

A Kyoma that ate a lot. That was interesting. But what did it mean? Adlet didn't even have the slightest clue how to begin to analyze that piece of information.

But Tgurneu had taken out a fig from the mouth in his chest and eaten it during their battle. And that didn't seem like a completely inconsequential action.

"...There was no description of Tgurneu being a giant eater in the past literature," Adlet said casually.

"The past literature?" Fremy asked, craning her neck to the side.

"Haven't you read Byrne's War Record? It's the written account of the first Heroes of the Six Flowers written by the survivors."

"I've never heard of it. Is Tgurneu recorded in it?"

Adlet nodded. Byrne's War Record was something anyone who sought to become a Hero of the Six Flowers read.

"I've also read Byrne's War Record." Rolonia said, raising her hand.

"Fulmer, the hero king was cool. Particularly when he fought one on one with Zophrair," Adlet said.

"My favorite was Peruke-san, the Saint of Fire. Even though she was the first to die among the six..."

Adlet and Rolonia then started to chat about the story before Fremy cut them off.

"There's something I want to know. In what way was Tgurneu depicted in the record?"

"Tgurneu's name doesn't directly appear. But among the Demon King Zophrair's subordinates there was a Kyoma that had almost the exact same appearance as Tgurneu."

"Demon King Zophrair?"

Adlet was surprised she didn't know about that either.

"Zophrair was the Kyoma that played an active role in the first great war of the Six Flowers. It seemed like he was the one who commanded the Kyoma at that time. Second to the Majin, the author Byrne gave him the title of Demon King."

"There used to be a Kyoma like that? I didn't know."

"Well, as you know the Six Heroes approached the west side of the Wailing Demon Territory by boat. They led the Kyoma away from their posts and when their ranks were thin, they landed. And then they launched a surprise attack all at once on the Land of Spilled Blood. That was where they confronted the Demon King Zophrair and 22 of his subordinates.

"Zophrair had the wings of a peacock and a mysterious appearance that wasn't quite a bird nor a cat. Byrne, the person who wrote the war record, said that he was the most beautiful existence he had ever seen."

"You know the account well."

"I thoroughly read Byrne's war account to the point where I memorized it. So as I was saying, Zophrair was a Kyoma that possessed a unique ability. Byrne had called him a Controlling Kyoma."

"What kind of ability was it?"

"The power to control other Kyoma and place them under his command."

"Zophrair's followers fought the Six Flowers in perfect sync. They didn't have to speak to one another, nor did they have to trade glances, they just cooperated perfectly. And it was written that no matter how many times the twenty two followers were killed, they came back to life, as long as Zophrair lived their numbers would not decrease."

"...A controlling type."

"Zophrair didn't issue commands to his subordinates. It appeared that he had complete control over them. His subordinates had lost their free will and had become a part of Zophrair."

"The record said that Zophrair had certainly given a part of his body to his Kyoma subordinates. And by giving a part of his body he could control other Kyoma. That is the power of the controlling type. Well, all of this is supposition from Byrne's written account."

"Plus it seemed that Zophrair also had the ability to make other Kyoma stronger. It is written that the instant Zophrair was gone the Kyoma under him would abruptly weaken," Rolonia added to the explanation.

"So, what happened?"

"Three of the Six Flowers restrained Zophrair while the remaining Flowers rushed into the Land of Spilled Blood. They then defeated the Majin. After the Majin had been beaten, Zophrair challenged the hero king Fulmer to a one on one battle, which Fulmer accepted. The end of their desperate struggle resulted in them both striking the other dead."

"..."

"In the records left by the second group of Heroes, Zophrair doesn't make an appearance. Nor was there a Kyoma that possessed the same abilities. There was only one controlling type Kyoma. It's appropriate then to call him the Demon King."

"Where does Tgurneu make an appearance?"

"There was a Kyoma that resembled Tgurneu among Zophrair's followers. Though there are a number of other records left behind by other Heroes, Tgurneu only appears in Byrne's."

"What did Tgurneu do in that account?"

"He didn't do anything significant. He fought with the Six Flowers, was beaten and killed. That's all."

"...I didn't know any of that. What I'd heard about the past great wars with the Six Flowers was completely different. And I'd never even heard of the so-called Demon King Zophrair."

That's odd, Adlet thought. Zophrair was without a doubt the strongest Kyoma in history. And as far as previous battles were concerned, Adlet didn't think Tgurneu even reached the same level. He wondered if the existence of such a powerful Kyoma would even be told to future generations of mankind.

"You didn't know about the past battles?" Adlet asked.

"I've heard of them. But it was completely different from what I'm hearing now. Tgurneu had told me that there wasn't anyone who commanded the Kyoma during the first war with the Six Flowers. The Kyoma had challenged the heroes in a disorderly fashion and were then defeated."

"...That's strange," Adlet said. Tgurneu had clearly hidden the existence of Zophrair from Fremy. *But for what reason?*

There were a number of elements that were unnatural about Tgurneu. His meals, the greetings, and the fact that he had hid Zophrair's existence. *However, how did any of them relate to Tgurneu's mystery?*

It was all too vague and Adlet still couldn't see a solution.

"...So it seems that we have to return to that place one more time after all." The place Adlet was referring to was the hill where they had been ambushed. It would take them about thirty minutes to reach the hill if they hurried.

"That's going to be difficult," Fremy replied. "This area is surrounded by Kyoma. Besides if there was a clue there then Tgurneu would come to stop us from finding it."

He wanted to avoid fighting with Tgurneu again while the mystery remained unsolved especially since the next time they encountered him they might not be able to get away. However, they had to consider how they would return to that hill because if there really were any clues then that was the only place they could be.

"I'll go and check. You two stay here," Fremy said and stood up.

"You're going by yourself?"

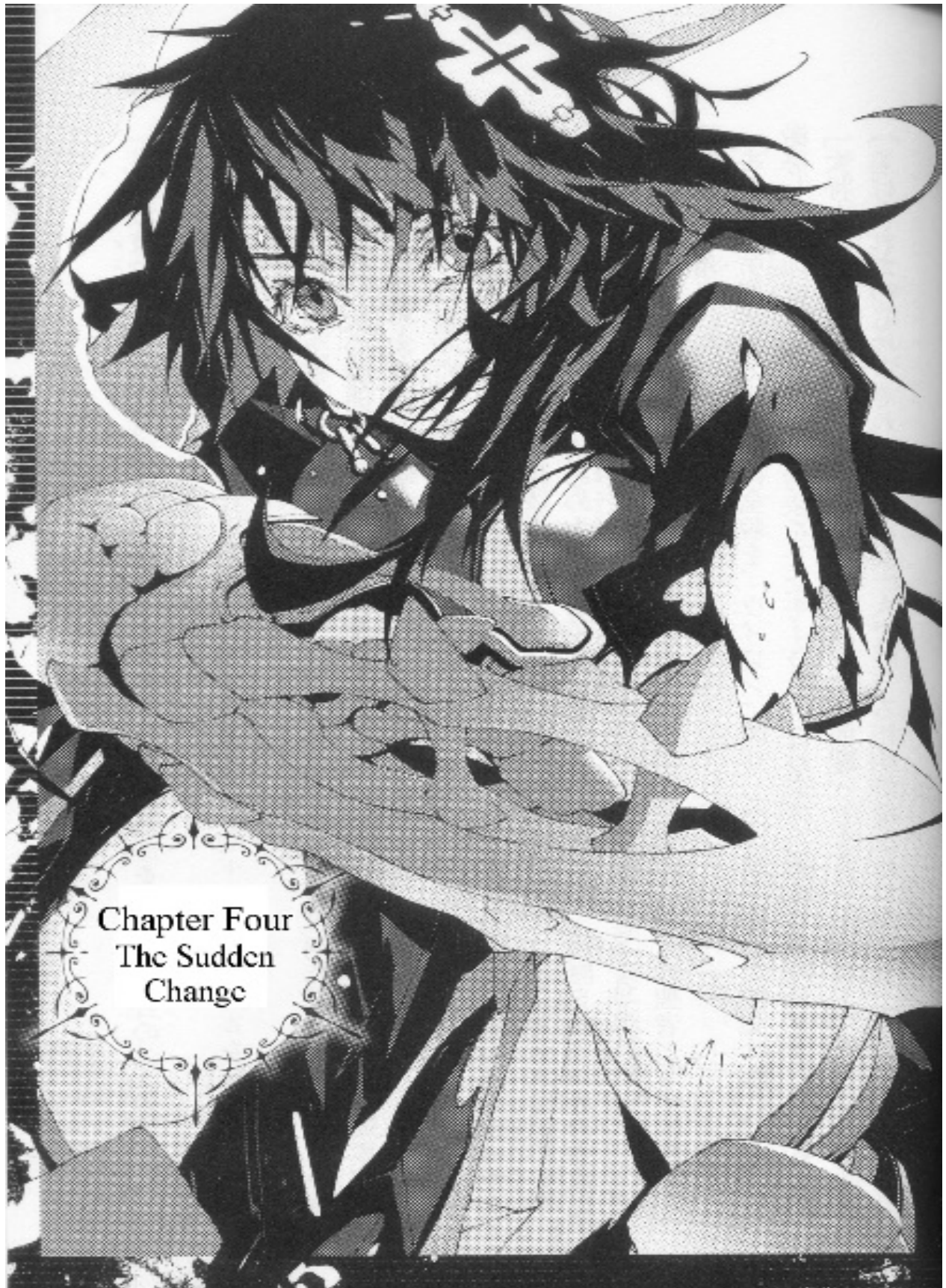
"It will be easier to do this alone since I won't need to pay attention to superfluous things."

"You can't. I'm going too. Rolonia's also tagging along."

"You haven't finished healing from your injuries. And Rolonia is just out of the question. I cannot take someone who might be an enemy."

That was when they heard Mora's voice from outside. "Tgurneu has come!"

After her announcement the three rushed out of the cave at the same time.



Chapter Four: Part One

The day was three years before the Majin's awakening. It was the day after Mora had finished her negotiations with Tgurneu.

"This is bullshit!"

An angry voice echoed inside Mora's personal room at the Head Temple. The speaker was a woman sitting across from Mora at a table. She then stood to her feet and smashed her fist into the table, breaking the furniture in two like a teacup of vase and scattering fragments across the floor. Those broken chunks of wood then turned into clumps of salt before crumbling onto the carpet.

"Weylynn, don't break my furniture," Mora said to Weylynn Coteau, the Saint of Salt.

At that time Weylynn was 25 years old. She had light brown skin and long jet-black hair. Her body was lean with toned muscles. She was clad in a robe with the sleeves ripped off and her hands were in leather gloves.

Her salt had the power to purify and drive away evil. So for generations the Saints of Salt had been in charge of creating barriers to ward off Kyoma. And they even had the power to temporarily render the toxin in the Wailing Demon Territory ineffective.

On top of that Weylynn had mastered the ability of changing enemies into clumps of salt. She was also considerably skilled at fighting, which was rare for Saints of Salt.

Mora had told her everything about her secret pact with Tgurneu. As Weylynn listened her first emotion was shock, but then that shock turned into rage. It wasn't towards Mora who had made an unforgiveable pact with a Kyoma, but with Tgurneu who had taken her daughter hostage.

"Boss¹! How can you be so calm?! Why didn't you beat that foolish Kyoma to death?"

"Because he got away. And he is not an opponent I can defeat on my own."

"...Bastard."

The maids came and cleaned up the giant piles of salt, after which they brought in a replacement table. When they were done, Mora confirmed that they had left before continuing her story. However, when she started to speak Weylynn suddenly tried to leave the room.

"Where are you going?"

¹ In Japanese the term translates to general, but the connotation is of a person in an authoritative position who is also close to the speaker. In English, phrases like Boss and Chief are used in the same manner.

"Isn't it obvious?! I'm going to go beat that bastard Kyoma to a pulp! You should come too, Boss!"

"Calm down. Where do you think he might be?"

"He's obviously in the Wailing Demon territory. I can enter with my power. We will take someone like Chamo and Asley, plus the princess and Leura-basan². It'll be a prelude to the battles of the Heroes of the Six Flowers."

"You're delusional. Your power would only allow you to remain in the Wailing Demon territory for two days at the most. And that would be nowhere near enough time."

"...Shit."

Weylynn reluctantly conceded and sat down on the sofa.

Mora held a special trust in Weylynn. She was a good woman who wasn't two-faced. She was sincere, able to keep a secret, and once she made a promise she wouldn't break it by any means. It was true she could be simplistic and impulsive, yet even so, among the Saints there was no one other than her who Mora could open her heart to.

² Weylynn speak very casually so she drops the O in Obasan. O is a polite marker in Japanese.

"So, is Sheniera-chan well?"

"You saw her recently didn't you? She's as good as new."

"The maids taught her how to write. She's a good kid. Does she know?"

"She doesn't know anything. She should just be thinking that she's recovered from her illness already."

Both Weylynn and Mora let out a miserable sigh at the same time.

"Is there anything I can do for that girl? Anything at all, Boss? Tell me," Weylynn pleaded encouragingly. That was one of her good points.

"...From now on I'll be devoting myself to training. I can't possibly defeat Tgurneu at my current strength. So during this time please protect the Head Temple."

"Leave it to me. But I didn't have to be asked to do something like that." Weylynn flexed her biceps and hit it with her fist.

"Tgurneu may also be threatening other Saints, so make arrangements to make this place more secure. Also cooperate with Marmanna and look into whether there is anyone like me who has had someone taken hostage. There are a lot of things to do."

"No problem. Relax Boss and focus on your training."

Mora had also asked Gunner to assist Weylynn, so she probably didn't need to worry. But at that moment Weylynn said something in a dispirited voice.

"Hey, Boss. Can I ask you something?"

"What is it?"

"I don't want to say this but..."

Weylynn was being unusually hesitant. It was as if she were trying to figure out how to phrase something that was difficult to say.

"If you are not able to defeat Tgurneu by the deadline, and it comes to you having to kill one of the Heroes of the Six Flowers, what will you do?"

"...Don't think about that. I will definitely kill Tgurneu."

"That...That's right. Sorry for the strange question."

"Stop evading and speak clearly. I won't get mad at whatever you are trying to say," Mora said.

Readying herself, Weylynn opened her mouth to speak. "Boss, if you aren't able to defeat Tgurneu within the allotted time...will you kill one of the Heroes of the Six Flowers in order to save Sheniera-chan?" Weylynn looked at Mora with a sharp gaze. "Because if that is your intent then I will have no choice but to kill you in order to protect this world. Although Sheniera-chan is important, I cannot trade her for the world."

"...Rest assured. I don't intend to do that."

"Sorry. I shouldn't have asked something like that."

"Don't worry about it. It was a natural question."

"Please Boss; you're the only one I can rely on. You absolutely must defeat Tgurneu and save Sheniera-chan," Weylynn said and then she smiled. "I care about that girl too. As I do for you too, Boss."

Mora smiled as well and gave a slight nod.

#

About three hours had passed since Goldof and Hans had headed to battle. It had grown late and the sun had already risen high into the sky.

"Hans come back to the barrier for a moment. You may not have noticed it, but you're quite tired and your movements are getting sluggish." Mora issued the order using the power of mountain echoes so that the Kyoma would not notice.

"Meow. It seems that you're right. I've also been thinking it was about time to fall back."

Hans' position was pretty far away from the Eternal Flower. So Mora used her second sight to find a path for him to return safely.

"Climb to the summit, then from there immediately rush downward. There are Kyoma halfway down, but I'll have Chamo assist you."

"Meow, meow, I got it. Goldof, this way."

Hans and Goldof then began to move. Meanwhile, Mora shifted her attention to Chamo who was busy stuffing her face with wild animals.

"Can you move your Jyuma? If you can, take care of the Kyoma above your position."

"Alright," Chamo replied. She then vomited out five Jyuma and made them head up the mountain. Mora noticed that they had a strange new luster on them different from before.

The area around Chamo was littered with bones. She had added almost all of the animals on the mountain to the contents in her stomach.

"...Ugh, as expected that wasn't so fun," Chamo said with a giant burp.

"What in the world have you been doing?"

"Chamo's been gathering animal oils."

"Oil?" Mora leaned her head to the side.

"It seems like this strange powder will grow hot if it touches water. So Chamo thinks that if Chamo's pets are covered in oil perhaps the powder's effect will be diminished considerably."

I see. That was definitely something only she would think of.

"Chamo doesn't know how effective it will be. And there isn't enough oil. Nevertheless, Chamo thinks Chamo will be able to manage somehow."

"Are you going to fight Tgurneu?"

"Uh-uh, Chamo's going to wait for everyone, since Chamo is not a child. Chamo can wait properly."

Mora smiled. Chamo was maturing little by little after all.

"That's right. You've always been a good kid. You've just made some mistakes."

Mora patted Chamo's head, but the girl swatted her hand away unhappily.
"Chamo said Chamo's not a child."

Even while she was talking with Chamo, Mora was vigilantly observing the state of the mountain. Hans and Goldof had received the Jyuma's assistance and were heading back to the Eternal Flower. And though the number of Kyoma had decreased, there was no indication that they had called for reinforcements.

Mora searched if anything else was happening in the area. And that was when Mora spotted something abnormal. Unconsciously, her entire body grew stiff.

Tgurneu was walking casually on the western side of the mountain. His gait lacked motivation, as if he were just taking a leisurely stroll.

He was taking four Kyoma with him. Two of them were large Kyoma over ten meters tall. One of the pair had the form of a reptile with a giant mouth. The other of the pair looked like a monster in the form of a huge jellyfish.

In addition there was a monkey Kyoma with rainbow-colored fur, and a Kyoma that looked like a human made out of stone.

"That Chamo Rosso was unbelievable. She looks completely different from what I've heard."

"Definitely. I wonder what the inside of her stomach looks like..."

"Just looking at her once I almost burst out laughing. I was like, come on, you're really human?"

Tgurneu was chatting happily with the monkey Kyoma. He had an attitude that seemed to suggest as if he weren't concerned at all about the state of the Eternal Flower or the Kyoma on the mountain.

"If we kill Chamo will the Kyoma she controls also be freed?"

"I wonder. Well it's nothing to worry about. They're just Cargikk's Kyoma after all." Tgurneu then added, "I wonder if Mora will kill someone soon."

"There has been no message saying that anything has occurred at The Eternal Flower. They're probably still confused," the monkey Kyoma said.

Tgurneu shrugged. "No matter how much of a fool she is, I think at the very least she can understand what 'there is no time' means. How long does she intend to keep me waiting?"

Eavesdropping on their conversation, Mora's skin rose with goosebumps out of anger. *Just how much is Tgurneu going to make a fool out of me?*

"Will Mora really kill one of them?"

"One or two more pushes might be needed. Well, at any rate it's just a matter of time. Let's wait a bit longer."

After that Tgurneu continued his leisurely stroll.

"What's the matter, Obachan?" Chamo asked from her side.

"...So he's finally come." Mora took out a stake from her bags. It was about as thick as her thumb and only about 30 centimeters long. It was so small that one couldn't see it without squinting. And a series of fine sacred words had been engraved into a pattern onto it.

For the three years after she had made a secret pact with Tgurneu, Mora did a lot of preparation to be able to kill him. She had summoned many Saints and with their cooperation she had been able to create various weapons.

The stake in her hands was one such weapon. She'd made it together with Weylynn, the Saint of Salt who was adept at creating barriers. Weylynn had called this particular barrier the Salt Crown.

"Tgurneu is coming!" Mora shouted and soon after Adlet jumped out of the cave.

#

"...And that's the situation."

Hans and Goldof had returned to the Eternal Flower and Mora just finished informing everyone of Tgurneu's arrival. When she told them about how Tgurneu had been chatting along as he walked casually, Adlet's eyes filled with anger. He bore a grudge towards Tgurneu just like Mora did.

"It is possible for us to trap Tgurneu at once. Were you able to make the preparations needed to defeat him?" Mora asked.

Adlet, Rolonia, and Fremy traded glances before regretfully shaking their heads.

"You still haven't thought of anything? But you had all that time. And Chamo is ready," Chamo said with a frown.

She was just as disappointed as Mora was. Mora had understood that the possible clues would be scarce, but she had thought Adlet would be able to find them.

"Well, there's nothing we can do about that now. We'll have to charge at him together."

Mora was about to thrust her stake into the ground but Hans stopped her.

"Meow, what will happen if we attack now? The battle would be just like before. Nothing has changed."

Mora tried to shake off Hans' hand. "We don't have that many chances to kill Tgurneu. Do you intend to overlook this opportunity?"

"I love being in a bind, but I hate rashness and recklessness. I for one think that to fight now would simply be ill-advised."

"Have you lost your nerve, Hans?!" Mora shouted, no longer hiding her irritation.

"What's wrong, Mora-san?" Rolonia asked.

Right after Fremy added, "Why are you in such a hurry?"

Mora's companions were staring at her with odd looks. If she were to continue to rush them, they would grow more and more suspicious of her.

"Sorry, but this is without a doubt the time to act. There's no way we can overlook this chance."

"Don't talk so strangely or you'll make me want to kill you," Fremy said with a cold stare. Rolonia then looked over at Fremy with a frightened look.

"Mora. How long will the barrier hold after it goes up?" Adlet asked.

"It was made to remain active for six hours. But it's just an instant barrier. I don't know whether it has the power to stay up for the whole time."

"Give me three hours. I will solve Tgurneu's mystery within that time. And if I can't, then I'll give up and we will all commence our attack."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to leave this mountain and return to the hill where we were ambushed. That is probably the only place where we can find any clues regarding Tgurneu's weaknesses."

Actually Mora wanted to go kill Tgurneu immediately. Tgurneu had said that she only had two days left. However, she couldn't object to Adlet's proposal.

"Alright, Adlet. You have to find some clue we can use. In the meantime, we will make sure Tgurneu doesn't escape."

Mora showed the stake in her hands to her companions.

"This barrier only restricts Kyoma from leaving and entering. You'll all be able to pass through it without any problems. After I activate it, head to the hill right away."

"Wait. Does that mean that I won't be able to leave the barrier?" Fremy asked.

"I'm sorry Fremy. I didn't know about you when I made this barrier. Can you remain here?"

"That's a bit unwise. There might be clues that we can't find without Fremy," Adlet said.

"Wouldn't it be alright to activate the barrier after Fremy-san has left?" Rolonia asked.

"If we do that then Fremy won't be able to come back into the barrier. Well then, I guess there's nothing we can do about it. We'll have to leave Fremy behind," Adlet conceded.

As Rolonia and Adlet discussed with one another, Mora was using her second-sight to survey Tgurneu's movements. He was still chatting carelessly.

"I'm going to raise the barrier, alright?" Mora asked and Adlet nodded.

But for some reason Hans seemed to have a puzzled look on his face. And Fremy was the same way, as if the two of them were confused about something.

"What's wrong?"

"Meow, I don't really have good memories when it comes to barriers, meow."

Indeed, Mora thought. However, this was not the time to worry about that now. With the help of the God of Mountains' power the stake in her hand began to emit light.

Normally there couldn't be two barriers in the same place. But the Eternal Flower barrier that the Saint of the Single Flower had created possessed qualities that were different from normal barriers. It had already been confirmed by past Saints that the Eternal Flower barrier would not clash with another barrier.

Right before thrusting the stake into the ground Mora used her second-sight to look at Tgurneu one more time. Just like before he was still strolling along and chatting with his subordinates.

"Cargikk still hasn't made a move?"

"It seems that way. Does he want to win?"

"Oh well. We can make fun of him for secluding himself away."

It seemed like nothing more than a chat. They were completely unaware of the approaching threat. *Could this guy possibly be just an idiot?* Mora was starting to wonder.

"...Hu!"

Mora stabbed the stake into the ground. The words engraved into the stake started to illuminate, then the ground began to shake violently.

"Mountains! Set free your hidden power and bestow it upon Mora Chester!"
Mora called to the mountain.

The mountain responded to Mora's voice. She absorbed power from the nature on the mountain and added it to her strength. It was a high level skill that few people, even among the Saints, could utilize.

Mora's call was directed at the salt within the ground of the mountain. She absorbed the purifying power the salt contained and reformed it into a barrier that would prevent the Kyoma from getting in or out.

A large amount of power was flowing towards her from the mountain, causing extreme heat to emanate from her body along with sparks that were flying out all around her. She poured all the power she gathered into the stake. And through the incantation of the sacred words engraved onto the stake, the power transformed into the form of a barrier.

"Salt Crown, rise!"

A thunderous roar reverberated through the air. Then an invisible wave was released from the stake. And in the next instant the entire mountain was covered in a veil of light.

"Did it work?" Adlet shouted. But there was no point in replying. It was safe to say the barrier had worked perfectly.

The barrier couldn't have been made without the cooperation of The Saint of Salt and the Saint of Mountains.

If the two of them didn't possess extraordinary powers it would have been something they wouldn't have been able to accomplish. If Mora had failed and she wasn't able to control the vast power flowing into her, there was the possibility that her body would disintegrate from the power.

"...Oh?"

Mora was once again observing Tgurneu with her power. The Kyoma looked at the veil of light that covered the air above his head with a smile. Though he was pretending it was not a problem, Mora could see that he was clearly unsettled.

"It's a barrier! Bring all our forces to Tgurneu-sama's location. Protect Tgurneu-sama!" The monkey Kyoma shouted.

His subordinates immediately started to spread across the mountain, calling for the other Kyoma to assemble.

"We might have to face the Six Flower's attack if we stay here. Let's leave this mountain immediately."

"You're right. And I hope we can, but I wonder if it's possible."

With a smile stretched across his face, Tgurneu started to descend the mountain.

"Tgurneu has been trapped. Adlet, head to the hill now," Mora commanded and Adlet nodded. "Rolonia, you go too. And Hans, you accompany them as well, alright?"

"Meow, of course it's alright. And Goldof, you come too, meow. After all, you would be useless if you just stayed here," Hans said and then slapped Goldof's back. Goldof showed no response, but it seemed like he understood.

"So four of us are going. Everyone, hurry and get ready," Adlet said, then he rushed into the cave.

Meanwhile, Tgurneu and his subordinates had finally managed to reach the edge of the Salt barrier at the foot of the mountain.

A Kyoma hit the light veil with their body, but as soon as their body touched it they erupted into flames sending sparks and smoke flying. Still alive, the Kyoma smashed its body into the barrier again and again, but the veil would not break. Soon the Kyoma's entire body was charred black and it stopped breathing.

"So it can't be broken after all?" Tgurneu touched the Kyoma's corpse. "It was probably Mora. However, it doesn't seem like a barrier that she could make by herself. I wonder if Weylynn worked with her."

The Kyoma scattered all over the mountain were assembling around Tgurneu. Tgurneu then began to issue commands to his underlings.

"It's a bit of a problem that we've been trapped here. Break the barrier."

A giant reptile Kyoma hit its head against the barrier. Then a lizard Kyoma spat acid at it. After that, a large amount of Kyoma tried attacking the barrier all at once.

Kneeling on the ground, Mora was still gripping the stake. Each time the Kyoma collided with the barrier it sent a vibration through the stake and up into her arm. So she added power from the God of Mountains to reinforce the barrier.

Tgurneu just stood there and watched as his Kyoma killed themselves one by one. *He's an utter fool*, Mora thought.

She just had to wait for Adlet to come back with what he was looking for. But until then she needed to continue to protect the barrier.

Please Adlet, I'm entrusting the life of my beloved daughter to you.

Chapter Four: Part Two

Adlet opened his iron box and began to fully replenish the pouches on his waist with the secret weapons he felt would be useful for the search.

"Ad-kun, I'm ready," Rolonia said.

He had told them to hurry, but Adlet had been the only one who needed to prepare. He swiftly filled his pouches.

"Adlet, take these with you."

Fremy handed him two small firecrackers. They were the signal firecrackers that he had used within the Illusion Fog Barrier. If he were to break one of them Fremy would instantly know his location.

"I've inscribed numbers onto them. Number one signals a request to be saved. If you smash that one then we will lower the barrier immediately and head off to help you. Number two is for contact. Break that one after you have found something."

"Got it. I don't think I'll need to use the first one."

Adlet stood and exited the cave. Goldof was waiting outside and as usual he seemed to be in low spirits.

"What's the situation with the Kyoma?" he asked Mora. She was still gripping on to the stake to maintain the barrier.

"Half of the Kyoma are with Tgurneu...they're gathering to the southwest. There are some on the lookout, but their numbers are few. They are more shorthanded to the north."

"If possible, I want to leave without them noticing us. Is there a path we can take where we won't be discovered?" Adlet asked.

"It's simple," Chamo replied from behind. "You can leave while Chamo's pets draw the enemy's attention."

Adlet was a little surprised. He didn't think that Chamo would voluntarily offer her cooperation.

Fremy then took out her gun and looked over the area. "I'll take care of any enemies looking this way. It's not a problem."

"Then, let's go. Our time is limited. We have to complete our task before Tgurneu makes a move," Adlet said and the group moved out.

Under Mora's instruction, Fremy and Chamo took out the surveillance Kyoma. And estimating when there would be no enemies in the area, Adlet and the three with him ran north without making a sound. As they slipped through the darkness, the group stayed low to the ground to minimize their exposure.

"There are three Kyoma in front of you," Mora said to them with her mountain echoes. "You most likely won't be able to proceed without them noticing you. Take care of them."

They could faintly see the Kyoma in the night. Adlet threw three paralysis darts at the still unaware group of Kyoma, and the instant the Heroes heard them groan Hans and Goldof rushed over and finished them off quietly.

"Now what's left is for us to run all the way until we get out of the barrier. Stay on your toes."

"Understood."

I can't let my guard down, Adlet thought as he ran. The seventh was going to make a move to protect Tgurneu if Adlet got near the truth. Hans, Rolonia, and Goldof. If any of them were the seventh then they would without a doubt try to kill him.

When they had finished descending the mountain they arrived at the giant veil of light blocking their path. Adlet and the others exchanged a final look before passing through the barrier and making their way to the east.

#

Mora used her second-sight to confirm the direction the four were moving into. That was the most she could do because once they leave the barrier they would no longer be within the effective scope of her abilities.

"The four descended the mountain and are now heading to the hill without any problems."

"That's great. Well...Chamo expected that they would be able to achieve that much," Chamo said.

Yet the problem was what came after. If they were able to find something of importance but couldn't return safely then it would have all been meaningless.

There were no Kyoma in the vicinity and silence had wrapped itself around the area. And within that silence Fremy had been staring silently in the direction that Adlet had left.

"What's wrong Fremy?" Mora asked, but Fremy didn't respond. She just averted her gaze and started to distance herself from Mora and Chamo.

Still gripping the stake Mora asked, "Are you that worried about Adlet, Fremy?"

After being silent for a while, Fremy whispered, "...I can't understand that idiot at all."

"What are you talking about? He's a reliable guy."

"At the moment Adlet is the only one who is definitely a genuine Flower. And it's evident that the seventh is seeking to attack someone. So then why is he leaving himself so vulnerable?"

"That might be Adlet's intent. Don't you think he's daring the seventh to attack him?"

"If that's true then I want to punch him." Fremy was clearly showing her anger, but Mora found it to be a bit charming.

"Do you like Adlet?"

"..."

Fremy once again went silent, but Mora didn't press her for an answer. Meanwhile, Chamo sighed in disinterest.

"I hate him. I can't help but get angry with him."

"Why?"

Staring at the ground, Fremy said, "If I worry about Adlet he would just keep me at arm's length and try to avoid me. He wouldn't even try to understand how I feel."

"...I see."

"When I'm with Adlet I have nothing but unpleasant feelings. It pains my heart when he is injured. And he makes me angry whenever we talk. He's made me irritated, sad, and even feel pity for him...there hasn't been one feeling since we've met."

"So from the beginning of all of this, things haven't gone very well for you two."

"I want to get rid of these feelings. I want to forget about him. If he could just go ahead and do me a favor by dying I actually think that would put me at ease."

Fremy raised her gaze and looked out to the eastern sky where Adlet was headed.

"I'm sure Rolonia has never experienced feelings like these before."

That's certainly true. Rolonia was a gentle girl. She was different from Fremy.

"I wonder what love is. You know sometimes Tgurneu would talk to me about love."

"Tgurneu?"

"Love is a very mysterious power that humans possess. And it is the most important thing in their minds. So in order to defeat humans, first one has to know about human love."

"He said such a thing?"

"I didn't know what he meant back then. And even now I don't know." Fremy pressed her hand to her chest. "If what I'm feeling is love then I absolutely can't understand humans. I don't understand why someone would cherish any person that makes them feel this way."

"...That's not an easy question to answer."

"What should I do? What do I want to happen to Adlet?" After that Fremy went quiet for a long time while Mora remained silent, unable to say anything.

"...I've talked too much," Fremy finally said and went back into the cave.

#

During her talk with Fremy Mora had stopped using her second-sight. They just had a long battle and she was tired too. So she wanted to rest up a bit.

That's why she didn't notice what Tgurneu had said at the edge of the barrier.

"Oy, good evening," Tgurneu said quietly with his hand covering his mouth. "Good evening, Mora. Good evening!" After repeating the greeting several times, Tgurneu leaned his head to the side. "That's strange. You can't be sleeping, right? I'll feel a bit lonely if you don't answer me. Especially since I'd like to help you kill one of the Flowers."

Once again Tgurneu called to Mora. "You have to hurry up and kill one of the Heroes. If you don't do it soon then the Saint of Salt Weylynn is going to kill Sheniera-chan."

There was no answer, so Tgurneu cocked his head to the other side in confusion and stopped calling for Mora.

#

"How are your legs feeling everyone?" Adlet asked his companions behind him as they advanced across the Wailing Demon territory at night. He was holding the gem that Fremy had given him, which was giving off a faint light.

"Of course I'm fine, meow. There is a cliff after this in that direction, so be careful."

"Umm, which way are we going?" Rolonia asked as she walked.

Adlet and the others hadn't been moving towards the east in a straight line. They had first headed south. When they came to a place with a slightly good view, Adlet laid face down on the ground and looked out towards the mountain.

The light given off by the salt barrier's veil illuminated the mountain and he could see the Kyoma slightly. The wind was also carrying their voices and he could hear that they were shouting at one another.

"What do you think, Hans?"

"What Mora said doesn't seem to be a lie. I think it's okay to trust her for now."

They had heard about the Kyoma's movements from Mora. However, there was no way they could completely trust what she had said without confirming it with their own eyes first.

"What are they doing?"

"They're probably trying to destroy the barrier."

The Kyoma were rushing at the barrier. When they touched it sparks flew up into the air and Adlet could hear them scream in agony. He wondered just how many had lost their lives in the attempt.

"We can't linger here. Let's go."

The four of them then continued on to the east. It seemed like the Kyoma in the area were mostly gathered on the mountain, so there was nothing obstructing their path.

At top speed the hill was less than thirty minutes away. And soon they managed to reach their objective, returning to the hill where about 12 hours ago they had engaged in a fight to the death with Tgurneu.

"Was it here?" Adlet used his light gem to light up an empty hole in the ground.

Fresh blood was still present on the ground and the smell of corpses hung in the air. The dead Kyoma were scattered all about the area and Hans and Goldof carefully checked each one of them, but none of them were still alive.

There were no signs of any living Kyoma anywhere near the hill. It had been left completely defenseless. Adlet wondered if it was out of carelessness, or because there was nothing of important, or because it wasn't necessary to place the area on guard.

"I found it. Over here."

Rolonia lifted her hand into the air. At her feet was the hole Tgurneu had made when he'd jumped out at them. The four of them assembled around the hole and peered inside.

Even with the gem shining light down into the hole, they still couldn't tell what was down there.

"It's pretty deep."

"Let me try searching inside." Rolonia unraveled her whip and lowered it into the hole. For a while the group listened as the whip hit against the walls of the hole.

"There's no one inside."

"I'm going to try going in." Adlet grabbed Rolonia's whip and entered down into the hole. When he landed at the bottom he shined the light gem around him.

The bottom of the hole was some kind of underground room. It was five meters in each direction and the dirt of the walls was bare without any decoration. There was wood strengthening the ceiling to protect against a cave-in. It was a completely plain room.

At the center of that space was a simple table and chair. There was a cloth-bound book atop the table and Adlet timidly picked up the book and tried reading it.

"What is this? Tgurneu reads stuff like this?" Adlet said unconsciously. The book was a collection of plays, but since Adlet was utterly unfamiliar with anything art-related, he really didn't understand its value.

He put down the book and looked around. There were awfully narrow tunnels that extended to the north and to the south. Probably someone as large as Tgurneu wouldn't be able to pass through without curling up his body.

Adlet tried shining the light gem into the tunnels, but they were deep and he couldn't see very far inside.

"...Well then, I guess I should search around."

Tgurneu had been there merely 20 hours earlier and perhaps whoever had made the Saint's poison ineffective had also been there. Whoever that person was, he had to expose their true identity. However, contrary to Adlet's expectations there hadn't been anything in the underground room. There was just the book, the table, and the chair.

"Would it be better if I came down too?" Hans asked from above at the top of the hole.

"No, I'm okay. Guard the outside," Adlet replied.

It was possible that the tunnel itself was a trap, and it might have been equipped with devices that would cause the tunnels to cave in and bury them alive. If the other three remained outside they would probably be able to come to Adlet's rescue. So, wishing that Chamo was there to help him with her ability to search within the ground, Adlet proceeded to investigate the northern tunnel.

He walked straight for about ten minutes. The tunnel had many branches and even the path he was on split into two ahead of him. So he didn't have the slightest idea how far he would have to travel before he could finally reach the exit.

"...Ah, I see now."

Adlet finally understood. For quite a long time the Kyoma seemed to have been making preparations to launch surprise attacks from the ground. They had dug holes under the entire hill and probably Tgurneu had been moving through them. And he had planned to attack when the Heroes of the Six Flowers revealed an opening in their defenses.

"What's up?" Adlet heard Hans ask when he returned to the first underground room.

"The tunnels are extensive. It'll take me till morning to check them all. How are things on the surface?"

"Things are peaceful," Hans said, just as a giant body suddenly dropped down from the top of the hole. Goldof had skillfully bent his giant frame as he jumped down and then landed into the open underground room.

On instinct Adlet readied himself, expecting Goldof to attack. But Goldof didn't make a move and just stared into Adlet's eyes.

"What...What's wrong?"

"Ad-kun! Are you alright?" Rolonia shouted as she peered down into the hole.

After a long silence, Goldof began to speak, "...It's dangerous to go alone."

"What! He talked!" Rolonia shouted overhead. Adlet was also quite surprised.

"What's this all about? You're able to speak again? Are you worried about me?"

"...I'm sorry." Goldof still hadn't returned to his usual state, so it took him a long time to continue. "...All this time I've been thinking. Yet I still haven't been able to come up with an answer...I think I'll finally understand if I think about a bit more."

"Understand what? What have you been thinking about?"

"I'll tell you soon." Goldof started walking towards the south tunnel entrance on the other side. "I'm going to go and take a look. If I find anything I'll let you know. Leave it to me."

And with that Goldof disappeared into the tunnel, soon even the faint light of his gem fading away.

Adlet placed his hand to his chest. *He sure does cause a lot of concern*, Adlet thought.

"What happened, Ad-kun?"

"...Let's leave it alone for now," Adlet replied.

Goldof was strong. Even if he encountered an enemy, unless something extremely unusual occurred he could probably settle it with his own strength. Right now Adlet had to focus solely on solving Tgurneu's mystery.

"Rolonia, Hans, don't move from there. I'll need your help if something happens to me," Adlet said and took out a chemical from his breast pocket that could find traces of the Kyoma. It was the tool he had used in the Illusion Fog Barrier. Once sprayed with the chemical, any item that had been touched by a Kyoma would change color.

One by one Adlet sprayed the chemical onto the table, the chair and then the ground of the tunnel. He had to hurry. Mora's barrier wouldn't hold forever.

#

Mora was standing at the Eternal Flower with her eyes closed and her arms folded across her chest. The veil of light covering the mountain shook continuously and Mora was devoting all her attention to funneling power into the barrier. The Kyoma were trying to break the barrier with all their strength and maintaining the barrier was much more difficult than she had anticipated. However, she couldn't complain. If the barrier fell then the Heroes would lose the perfect chance to defeat Tgurneu.

"...Adlet still hasn't returned?" Mora asked.

"I haven't received any contact that he has found anything. Keep the barrier up for two more hours," Fremy replied.

"I'm on it. I can keep this up for a while," Mora said and then sent more power into the barrier.

Mora had stopped using her second-sight ability so that she could pour all her energy into maintaining the barrier. However, once every five minutes Mora activated it again just to check on Tgurneu for a short while.

There were a large amount of Kyoma drawing close to the barrier both within and outside it. In a collective effort they were all attacking the barrier.

Chamo had ordered her Jyuma to try and stop them. But not all of the Jyuma had recovered, so their attacks were sporadic.

Protected by his Kyoma, Tgurneu was sitting atop a boulder staring blankly at the barrier. He issued orders but he didn't seem to have any kind of future plan. Mora could see that he was waiting for something.

Suddenly Tgurneu raised one of his hands into the air. When he did all the Kyoma working on attacking the barrier stopped.

"Alright. We've confirmed how strong it is."

The light veil stopped shaking. *What are you planning?* Mora wondered as she looked on at him with her second-sight.

Tgurneu then abruptly looked up the mountain, staring in about the right direction of the Eternal Flower.

"Mora, aren't you going to answer me soon? I've been calling you over and over again for a while."

Mora gulped.

"Can you hear my voice? You should have the ability to talk to me, so why aren't you saying anything? Are you scared to talk with me, even though I pledged to tell the truth?"

"Mora, what's happening?" Fremy asked at her side.

Mora's heart was racing. "I don't know. They suddenly stopped attacking the barrier. Please don't talk to me right now. I want to concentrate on checking on Tgurneu. "

Fremy stared at Mora with a sharp gaze. Mora was sure that if she displayed any suspicious behavior Fremy would kill her. But she couldn't ignore Tgurneu's call.

"...Tgurneu. What do you want?" Mora replied using the power of mountain echoes. And so that she wouldn't seem suspicious to Fremy, Mora created the echoes without using her own voice.

"You finally replied. Well then, I've said it multiple times, but you have no time. I fear Sheniera-chan will die if you do not kill one of the Flowers within two days."

Goosebumps appeared all over Mora's entire body.

"By any chance have you already killed one of the Heroes? Was it Adlet after all? Or Rolonia? They seem like they'd be easy to deal with. However, I would be jumping up for joy if you killed Hans or Chamo. Those two are scary."

"...I haven't killed anyone."

"I thought that was probably the case." Tgurneu shrugged. "You truly are a cruel mother. Isn't a mother's love supposed to be able to surmount any challenge? Do you realize that you have missed many opportunities to save Sheniera-chan?"

"Shut up. What does a Kyoma know? You're a monster that knows nothing about love or honesty," Mora said. And for the first time Tgurneu's expression changed and Mora could faintly see what looked like anger.

"...I will ignore that insult, because I am a generous Kyoma."

"There's something I want to ask you. What do you mean by I have no time?"

"What does it mean indeed? Hmm, I wonder if it's necessary for me to tell you. Well, what you ought to know is that you only have two days left. That's all," Tgurneu then made a malicious smile.

"I was surprised by this barrier, but it was a waste of effort. I can't be killed by any of you."

And as soon as I leave this barrier I will not show myself again for the remainder of the next two days. So this is my warning; if you intend to save your daughter then quickly kill one of the Heroes of the Six Flowers."

Mora couldn't say anything.

"Perhaps if all of you attack at once right now you might be able to kill me. But I figure you all still aren't prepared to kill me, right? Since if you were you should be coming here right now."

As if tired of waiting, Fremy stood up and said, "What's happening Mora? Explain."

"I don't know. And since nothing is happening there's no reason for me to talk."

"...That accomplishes nothing. I'm going to check on Tgurneu."

Fremy gripped her rifle and dashed away from the cave, with Chamo following behind her soon after. However, Mora stayed where she was and spoke to Tgurneu once again.

"...Who is the seventh? If you tell me that then I can kill one of the Heroes right now."

"Do you intend to bargain with me? Sorry, I cannot reveal that." Tgurneu shook his head. "Hans Humpty, Chamo Rosso, Fremy Speeddraw, Rolonia Manchetta, Goldof Aurora, Adlet Maia. If you kill any one of them I will release your daughter. It doesn't matter if that person is the seventh."

"...Did you say it doesn't matter if I kill the seventh?" Mora muttered.

It seemed like Tgurneu was thinking about something, so Mora used her second-sight to look at the middle of the mountain. Fremy and Chamo had been stopped by ten or so Kyoma.

"Look Mora, there is someone fighting over there. If you go and kill them from behind you would be able to save the daughter you love. You do love your daughter, don't you?"

"Why? Why are there only two days left? The deadline should be the 22nd day after The Majin awakens!" Mora shouted without thinking. It helped that Fremy wasn't there.

Hearing Mora's words, Tgurneu pressed his hand to his mouth and began to laugh.

"What's so funny?"

"Ah, excuse me. I was just reminiscing about something. I can't stop laughing when I think about how you were when we made the pact three years ago."

Tgurneu's mouth eerily twisted into a wide grin. Previously Mora had thought that even within his eeriness there were some traits that were quite human. However, his smile now was completely that of a monster.

"The 22nd day after the Majin awakens? You really are an idiot. Although we set that deadline, it's meaningless."

"What?"

"You made a mistake. Yet even if you hadn't it would have only given you a seven day extension."

"What do you mean?"

"You involved Weylynn the Saint of Salt. That was your mistake."

Mora's legs were shaking violently. Weylynn's face with her bighearted smile appeared in her mind.

It couldn't be. It was impossible. She would never betray me.

Weylynn never got tired of helping people and she would never allow evil or unreasonable actions to go unchecked. Also, not only had she been Mora's friend for a long time, but she even loved Sheniera too. Out of all the Saints, Mora would choose her as the one she could trust the most.

"Weylynn is innocent. She is a truly incredible person, even though she's a bit slow."

Tgurneu suddenly took out a charcoal pen and a piece of wood from the mouth in his chest.

"Didn't I show you this before? I can copy a person's handwriting even if I only glance at it once. You should give me a compliment. I studied tirelessly every day for 50 years."

Mora recalled how three years ago Tgurneu had forged The Saint of Medicine, Toulou's handwriting, and sent her a letter.

"I copied your handwriting and sent a letter to Weylynn. It should be arriving any time now. And to put it simply these were its contents:

"Weylynn. Don't let anyone read this letter. And after you read it, burn it immediately. Gunner is faint of heart and if you were to show him this letter, he might go insane."

As he spoke, Tgurneu wrote the same letters onto the piece of wood. No matter how Mora looked at it, that was her handwriting. Probably Mora herself wouldn't be able to tell it apart from her own handwriting.

"I was tricked by Tgurneu. Which means I may no longer be able to save Sheniera.

"Fifteen days after the Majin awakes the parasite nesting within Sheniera will release a special toxin. After she has been affected by the poison she will remain alive, but she will be transformed into a Kyoma. If that happens, then even if I try to kill her it won't make a difference. Her body would have become unable to be killed. And from then on she would suffer through the pain of hell for as long as she lived.

"I made a pact with Tgurneu so that Sheniera wouldn't be harmed. But Tgurneu doesn't view what he is doing as an attack. He sees it as giving Sheniera the gift of being born anew as a magnificent Kyoma. To him it is just a splendid act of benevolence."

Tgurneu tossed aside the piece of wood and continued. "Toulo can't even save her. I fear she probably doesn't even know how to remove the toxin. I will prove to you that I can definitely kill Tgurneu by the time the fifteenth day after the Majin awakes passes. But if that doesn't happen..."

"...You bastard." Mora's legs were trembling.

"If when midnight passes on the 15th day the bruise on her chest still hasn't disappeared, then for me, kill Sheniera."

Tgurneu spread his arms up exaggeratedly like a third-rate actor.

"How did you like it? It's a wonderful thing isn't it? After that I wrote sentences saying how much you were sorry and how much you loved Sheniera, but for now I omitted them."

Tgurneu showed a cruel smile as he continued. "If your husband reads this he might realize that it is a forgery. But, would Weylynn ignore the initial instructions?"

"I'm sorry, but Weylynn Couteau is simple. She's also loyal and honest. It doesn't seem like she'll realize it's a fake letter and I think she will definitely follow your commands.

"Of course Weylynn or your husband may be on the lookout for fake letters. And they might hesitate to kill Sheniera even if they don't realize that this is a fake. And maybe there was perhaps some mistake and the letter wasn't delivered. Nevertheless, this should serve as a sufficient threat, don't you think?"

He'd promised. He'd promised that he wouldn't lie to Mora. So what he said was true. He really did send a letter.

"I promised that I would never lie to you. However, I can lie to Weylynn. And though I promised that the Kyoma would not touch Sheniera, a human killing Sheniera would not negate that promise."

Mora was at a loss for words. Her imagination was growing rampant within her mind. She saw an image of Weylynn reading her letter, then grabbing her head in distress. Then she saw an image of Sheniera energetically clasping her hands together as she waited for Mora's return.

"By the way, I'll tell you this. The transcribing clerk you had employed five years ago by the name of Cannan was the one who had betrayed you. She easily turned on you for money and she passed on various information to me. She even helped me plant the parasite into Sheniera. She finally realized that her employer was a Kyoma just before I ate her. Well, it doesn't matter now anyway."

Nothing that he'd said had reached Mora's ears.

"Even a simpleton like you should already pretty much understand, right? You have only two days left. And in order to save your daughter you have no choice but to kill one of the Heroes of the Six Flowers."

"...Tgurneu."

"I will say it again for you. Even if you kill me, it will make no difference. I have a plan to escape from this barrier. And right now it is unfolding nicely."

Mora stared towards the east and spotted Adlet. *Hurry*, she called to him in her mind. *Please hurry and come back.*

#

“Ad-kun, what’s going on?” Rolonia called to him. But Adlet didn't answer. He was just staring at the ground and the walls.

The space beneath the ground was dyed red. Adlet had sprayed the chemical that reacted to Kyoma secretions all over the underground room.

When the chemical was applied the places that a Kyoma had touched would change color. And every single Kyoma would cause a different color to appear. He sprayed the chemical onto his armor to confirm and the places that Tgurneu had touched turned a reddish brown.

In the room there were countless places the Kyoma had touched. However, they had all changed the same color; a reddish brown.

There hadn't been any Kyoma other than Tgurneu in the underground room. And when Adlet searched the tunnels he found the same result.

"Tgurneu was....the only Kyoma here."

"Well, didn't you say that some Saint had been cooperating with Tgurneu?" Rolonia asked.

That too seemed unlikely. Adlet had thoroughly investigated the tunnels and the ground and there were no traces that a human had been there. There hadn't been one human footprint left in the soft earth, nor was there any evidence that the footprints had been swept away.

Where in the world were the Kyoma or Saint that had protected Tgurneu from the poison?

"..."

There was no longer any other way to look at it. Their proposals had been wrong. Both Rolonia's analysis and the suggestion that the blood of a Saint would work on any kind of Kyoma had to be incorrect.

"No...that's not right."

He had overlooked something. Adlet looked over the underground room once again.

This time his eyes rested on the table. He was looking at just one part of the table that had been changed to a reddish brown. It was only a point as small as the tip of his finger, but that section had actually changed orange.

Adlet immediately sprayed more of the chemical on that spot and confirmed the orange color. It was a circle no more than three centimeters in diameter, so small that he had first overlooked it.

Perhaps it belonged to the Kyoma that brought the table there. No, that couldn't be it. The change in color happened atop the table, around the center.

There had been another Kyoma other than Tgurneu in the room. Yet it must have been terribly tiny, so small that it could be held on one's finger. He'd never heard of there being a Kyoma of that size.

Who is this small Kyoma? And where have they been? What have they been doing? And where did they go? Adlet thought back to the battle with Tgurneu and he came to one answer.

There's no way. If there really is a Kyoma of this size then what in the hell are they?

"...Ad-kun. Ad-kun."

Lost in thought, Adlet hadn't noticed Rolonia calling him.

"What's the matter?"

"Where did Goldof-san go?"

Adlet checked the area around him. Then after thinking for a while, he rushed down the tunnel that Goldof had disappeared into.

Chapter Four: Part Three

A minute, an hour, a day; Mora couldn't feel any of it. Other than pouring her energy into the barrier, she could do nothing else but wait for Adlet and the others to return.

She did, however, use her second-sight to watch Tgurneu. He was sitting calmly atop a boulder, staring into the direction of the Eternal Flower. As for the rest of the Kyoma, they had already stopped their attacks on the barrier.

Mora no longer knew how long she would be able to keep Tgurneu trapped within the barrier. The barrier still had power, but she couldn't predict what Tgurneu's next move would be. Not only that, Tgurneu already confirmed that he had prepared a plan for breaking through the barrier.

Mora touched her solar plexus. There lay her final trump card, a red jewel that had been surgically embedded into her body. Mora and the Saint of Fire Lenelle had combined their powers to make it. And it was her most powerful weapon.

The jewel contained the power of a volcanic eruption. When the sacred words are incited, the jewel would absorb the enormous power of the magma from within the ground. And there was no controlling that power. It would simply cause a gigantic explosion and obliterate both Mora and everything around her.

The first time she had fought with Tgurneu, Mora hesitated to use the weapon, since at that time she still had thought that there was a chance she could kill him. But now she was starting to regret that decision.

Soon Fremy and Chamo, who had headed out on reconnaissance, returned to the Eternal Flower.

"It's just as you said. Tgurneu isn't doing anything. I wonder what it could mean," Fremy said.

"...Fremy, has Adlet still not returned?"

Fremy looked at Mora's unusual demeanor with a suspicious look.

"Not yet. He hasn't contacted me yet saying he has found anything."

That made Mora despair. *How much longer can I wait for him to meet my expectations? Especially now, since I'm out of time.*

Mora picked up her metal gauntlets from the ground and slipped her arms into them. Then she started to walk away from the Eternal Flower.

"Where are you going?"

"I'm going to fight Tgurneu. I can't wait for Adlet any longer."

"Obachan, what's with you? Calm down. Isn't Tgurneu trapped in the barrier?"
Chamo asked.

"Give your undivided attention to preserving the barrier while you wait for Adlet."

"No. If you can't beat Tgurneu..."

"There's no need to rush. In the case that Tgurneu escapes it would not be a considerable loss. This isn't the only chance we will have to kill him. There will be other fights later when we are definitely ready to defeat him."

"Fremy's right. What are you saying Obachan?" Chamo added.

Surely from their standpoint it might not seem like something they should do. However, Mora no longer had any time. She ignored the two of them and continued walking.

"...Mora, I'm asking you to stop." This time Fremy took out her rifle, a sound that finally got through to Mora's ears. "I barely trusted you. So tell me, what are you hiding? Why are you in such a rush? I will not lower my rifle until you explain."

"What are you doing, Fremy!" Chamo shouted in anger. Several of the Jyuma she had spat out then surrounded Fremy.

"Chamo, think about this calmly. Mora isn't being upfront with us."

"You're the same way Fremy. You haven't been entirely honest with us at all."

Chamo and Fremy glared at one another. Although Mora had her back turned and couldn't see them with her own eyes, she was able to watch them with her second-sight. And the moment Fremy aimed her rifle away from Mora and pointed it at Chamo, Mora rushed away.

"Mora!" Fremy shouted.

Mora could no longer depend on Adlet. And she couldn't expect Fremy or Chamo to help her either. In the end, she had no choice but to kill Tgurneu with her own hands. She would use the final weapon fashioned into her chest, and when she stopped Tgurneu her daughter would be saved. That was the only option she had left. Tgurneu had said that he had a plan for escaping from the barrier. She couldn't give him the time to realize that plan.

She left the Eternal Flower, and after walking for a minute the Kyoma attacked her. Mora didn't stop for a moment and just rammed through them. She had no time to be worrying about the insignificant pawns.

When Tgurneu noticed the faraway sounds he called out, "Whoa, what happened? Hey Mora, what's the matter?"

She didn't answer. She just continued to strike down the Kyoma blocking her path and trampled them under her feet. Tgurneu shouldn't be aware of the eruption gem. So if she got close she would be able to finish him off. Tgurneu was expecting her to kill one of the Heroes, so he most likely wouldn't kill her that easily. And that definitely created the opportunity she needed to get close to him.

No, I have to make that opportunity.

"Mora, stop!" Fremy shouted as she chased after Mora.

"If you're going to shoot, then shoot," Mora replied.

But in that moment she didn't pay enough attention to her surroundings and was grabbed by a Kyoma. Fire then erupted from the muzzle of Fremy's rifle and the bullet grazed Mora's arm, sending scraps of her sleeve flying up into the air.

"Fremy! If you kill Obachan, Chamo will kill you too!" Chamo screamed from behind. She had brought along her Jyuma and was also pursuing both Fremy and Mora.

"It seems like the Heroes of the Six Flowers are making their charge. Half of you stop them."

Mora watched with her second-sight as the Kyoma within the barrier followed Tgurneu's orders and began to move.

Chamo's Jyuma finished off the enemies Mora had tossed to the side. But the Kyoma standing in her way were increasing. She beat down a giant, dog-type Kyoma, then wrapped herself around a lion Kyoma and snapped its neck.

Onward and onward, Mora advanced.

"Mora! Return to the Eternal Flower!"

One of Fremy's bullets grazed Mora's shoulder. But still, Mora didn't pay it any mind and continued to run. As long as Chamo was there Fremy wouldn't kill Mora. Plus Fremy was also being attacked by the Kyoma.

"Obachan, what happened all of a sudden? If you don't explain Chamo won't understand!"

The Kyoma were also increasing their attacks against Chamo. She commanded her Jyuma to fight them off as she frantically ran after Mora. The situation was transforming into an extremely confusing mess. Mora was just driving forward, Fremy was trying to stop her from behind, and while Chamo was trying to prevent Fremy from killing Mora she was also trying to stop Mora's reckless dash.

The Kyoma were attacking the three Heroes equally. And from an outsider's perspective it was probably a funny sight.

As she fought, Mora used her second-sight to check on Tgurneu. He had formed his Kyoma into ranks and the monkey Kyoma, who even among Tgurneu's subordinates seemed to have a high position, was issuing orders. Meanwhile Tgurneu was sitting on the tail of one of the reptile Kyoma, staring in the Heroes' direction with his hand on his chin.

There were more than eighty Kyoma blocking her path, and Mora knew that it was far too many for her to take out by herself. However, there was no way she would stop. She couldn't allow Tgurneu to get away.

"Come back Mora! What do you intend on doing?" Fremy made a giant leap and landed square in front of Mora, right in her way.

"It's obvious. I'm going to kill Tgurneu!" Mora shouted.

Fremy hesitated. If she had believed that Mora was the seventh then she wouldn't care about Chamo and would be shooting. Yet Mora wasn't fighting her companions. She was fighting the Kyoma with her sights on Tgurneu.

"Are you the enemy? Or are you just a hopeless fool?"

"You're in my way. Step aside!" Mora said and then slipped past Fremy.

Fremy shot at her, but Mora blocked it with her gauntlet. Next Fremy threw bombs at her, but Mora didn't even flinch at the explosions.

"Chamo, what is Mora trying to do?"

"You don't know?! Chamo doesn't know either!"

"Help me fight, you two!" Mora shouted at them. "Create a path for me!"

The two of them are confused, but it doesn't matter, Mora thought. I can't count on anyone else anymore. From the beginning the only person who could save Sheniera has been me.

At the edge of the barrier Tgurneu was facing the battlefield with a wide grin.

"Mora, I can hear you all the way over here. You shouldn't get so angry."

The Flowers were only fighting half of the Kyoma. The remaining Kyoma remained lined up in ranks, waiting motionlessly for something. And even though Mora was getting closer, Tgurneu didn't seem worried at all.

"Obachan! How are you going to get through on your own?! Do you want to die?!" Chamo shouted.

Mora had that exact thought in her mind, and it repeated incessantly. But if she could save her daughter's life then she didn't care if she died.

Mora did have regrets though. If she had worked with her companions and combined their strengths earlier on then they would have been able to kill Tgurneu. But Mora had thought that she had time until Sheniera was going to die. And it was that kind of soft thinking that had brought about the current situation.

But she wouldn't hesitate any more. She was fine with dying if it was to save her daughter.

#

I wonder how much time has passed, Mora thought as a giant reptile Kyoma stood in her path. It was one of the high ranking Kyoma Tgurneu had brought along. Mora had been fighting with it for a long time, but no matter how many times she hit it, it would not die.

"Get out of the way!"

I will kill Tgurneu. That was the only thing she thought about it for the past three years. She had trained, polished her skills, and fought with strong warriors all over the world to make up for her lack of actual battle experience. Along with the Saint of Salt Weylynn she had created a barrier that could trap Tgurneu. And with Lenelle, the Saint of Fire's help she had made the gem that would kill Tgurneu. Nevertheless the unease never faded from her mind.

She had told Weylynn that she didn't intend to kill any of the Heroes so that she could save her daughter's life. However, all along she had known deep down that no matter what happened to her, she could never abandon her daughter.

So if Tgurneu escaped from the barrier, Mora would kill one of the Six Flowers.

"Chamo retreat. We should let Mora go!" Fremy shouted as her bombs blew away the approaching Kyoma. She was tossing out bombs as she escaped from the Kyoma's attack.

"Mora intends to die! So if she wants to die then let her die as she pleases!"

"No way! Chamo will bring Obachan back! You can run by yourself!"

Fremy had already given up on hitting Mora with her bullets. Her hands were full just dealing with the Kyoma that were attacking her.

"You are in my way! Shut up and move aside!" Mora shouted either to the Kyoma or to Chamo.

Mora thrust her hand into the mouth of the reptile Kyoma standing in her path. She then grabbed hold of its tongue and dug her feet into the ground. And with a scream that shook the earth, she lifted the Kyoma and hurled it over her shoulder.

There were one hundred meters left till Tgurneu. He was so close that if it were during the day she would have been able to see him with her naked eyes. He was being protected by his Kyoma that were arranged in lines and staring her way.

The reptile Kyoma she had thrown stood back up and leaped at Mora. Mora reacted to the attack just in time, barely managing to dodge to the side before the Kyoma crushed her. The Kyoma stood back up immediately and rushed towards her in attack.

"It's alright to leave Fremy and Chamo alone. Just don't let Mora get close to me!" Tgurneu shouted. There was no need for her to use the power of her second-sight; she could hear him directly.

And upon hearing him Mora instantly realized that Tgurneu was aware of Mora's objective. He probably didn't know about the eruption gem, but he could sense that Mora was attempting to lay down her life.

"Tgurneu! Are you a coward? Come at me!" Mora shouted as she fought with the reptile Kyoma.

"I can't do that. I can clearly see that you are coming to do something."

"...I said come at me!"

However, Tgurneu didn't move.

And Adlet still hadn't returned.

#

Adlet could hear something strange as he was running down the tunnel. Someone was screaming in the distance. The sound was echoed again and again throughout the vast tunnels to the point that he didn't know from where the sound had originated.

"What is that idiot doing?"

Adlet frantically ran down the labyrinthine tunnels. On the way he stopped and carved marks so that he wouldn't forget the way. It wouldn't be a laughing matter if one of the Heroes of the Six Flowers were to get lost.

"This guy Goldof has been causing us nothing but trouble," Adlet said, unconsciously voicing his inner thoughts.

There was no guarantee of how long Mora would be able to keep Tgurneu trapped. And if Tgurneu moved it might put Fremy and the others in danger. There wasn't any time to waste. Perhaps two hours had already passed. And at the rate they were going they would have to return without any results.

"But whose voice is that?"

From deep within the tunnels he could hear something screaming in agony. It wasn't Goldof's voice, but a Kyoma's. However, soon the voice grew weaker until he could no longer hear it. And after that he faintly heard what sounded like something breaking.

"What's over there....?"

He was finally close to the sound. When he rounded the corner of where the sound was located he readied his sword. He didn't know what would jump out at him.

"...Wha..."

When he turned the corner he saw Goldof and the corpse of a human-type Kyoma covered in steel skin. Adlet could feel the bile rising up in his stomach. No matter how many times he looked at the Kyoma's corpse he could only describe the scene as extremely cold-blooded.

"What are you doing?"

Both of the Kyoma's hands had been snapped and both of its legs had been torn off from the knees down. The part of the Kyoma that seemed to be its head was stained the color of rust. And at the moment Goldof had his hands on the Kyoma's throat and it looked like he had been strangling it.

Goldof checked that it was Adlet before saying quietly, "I'm... fighting with a Kyoma."

"I can see that."

Goldof's spear was still sheathed on his back without a single drop of blood on it. *Could he have possibly ripped apart the Kyoma with his bare hands?*

"I tried to interrogate it, but....I wasn't very successful. Since it was my first time I didn't know how."

"...You..."

"Come to think of it, someone had said that interrogating a Kyoma wouldn't work," Goldof muttered as he crushed the Kyoma's face in his hands. The strength of his hands made Adlet catch his breath. He was neck and neck with Hans, and the cat-like warrior was also superhuman.

"Are you an idiot? Do you think a Kyoma would spit out information? Let's head back." Adlet then began to run and Goldof obediently followed behind him.

"The Kyoma talked a lot more than I had thought."

"Is that so?"

"They will easily go to their deaths if they are ordered, but at the same time they also cling to life. That Kyoma had said over and over again that it wouldn't die and that it would absolutely kill me. It was strange."

"I see. I'm glad you were able to learn something. Now hurry and run." Adlet's tone was rough out of irritation.

"It seemed like the Kyoma was on Tgurneu's side. But it wouldn't say why he was here. Nor would it tell me the seventh's true identity or where the princess went. It didn't tell me anything."

As Goldof was muttering, Adlet's mind focused on Tgurneu's mystery. *Who was that small Kyoma? And why hadn't the blood of the Saints affected Tgurneu?*

"That Kyoma resented the fact that it couldn't kill me. Over and over again it said that it wanted to kill me."

I'd be okay with you not talking, Adlet was about to say, when Goldof added. "He had said that I wouldn't be a problem if he had his Master Tgurneu's power."

Hearing that Adlet stopped moving. Goldof then bumped into him from behind sending Adlet flying forward. His face smashed into the ground.

"...Are you alright?"

Goldof tried to help Adlet up. But without taking his hand, Adlet continued to lie on the ground. His intuition was speaking to him. And it was saying that there had been something important about what Goldof had just said.

Still on the ground, Adlet thought about Goldof's curious words.

"Say that one more time, exactly as the Kyoma had."

"If I had my Master Tgurneu's power you wouldn't be a problem."

"Is that exactly what he said, word for word? Did he definitely say that?"

"That's right. He said it like that. If I had my Master Tgurneu's power. Hurry on and get up."

Adlet was able to derive a single theory from those words. Tgurneu had the ability to give strength to other Kyoma. But Rolonia had said that Tgurneu shouldn't have any special power.

All of Adlet's memories up until that point rushed about his head. Their first battle with Tgurneu. Rolonia's analysis and their subsequent conversation with Fremy. The Demon King Zophrair's existence. The fact that Tgurneu was the subordinate of Zophrair in the past. The underground room. The strange tunnels. The Kyoma's strange words.

And the fact that the blood of the Saints did not work on Tgurneu.

All of the facts pointed to one answer.

"Goldof, you may have just done us the greatest service," Adlet said as he stood.

In a big hurry they returned to their original location. Rolonia lowered down her whip which they grabbed and used to clamber up the hole.

"So you've finally returned? I was tired of waiting, meow," Hans said to Adlet when he reached the top.

Beside him Rolonia asked, "What did you find out? What should we do now?"

"I was able to glimpse a possibility. However, I have no proof."

"Should we go back? I'm also worried about Mora."

Adlet shook his head. Then he looked over the dark hill and said, "No, we will look for the proof. If my memory is correct, the proof should be on this hill."

"Proof?"

Rolonia and Hans looked at him wide-mouthed as if to say, what are we going to be searching for? Adlet understood how they felt. It was an extremely wild theory. But if his thinking was correct then the solution to all of the mysteries would come soon.

#

The reptile Kyoma finally died. And Tgurneu still had not escaped. There was no more than 50 meters left between him and Mora. And once she had closed that distance and made her way to his side she would explode the eruption gem.

Then everything would come to an end.

"This isn't good people," Tgurneu said to his Kyoma as he looked at the approaching Mora. "Mora cannot get close to me. Wasn't that my only order? Are you not even able to do something like that?"

15 Kyoma of various appearances headed towards Mora. Mora struck one of them in an attempt to clear a path. But even with its broken face, the Kyoma managed to wrap itself around Mora and held down one of her arms.

"So, you're all pretty persistent when you put your mind to it."

One after another the Kyoma grabbed Mora. They traded their lives just to restrain Mora for several seconds. All this time Tgurneu simply looked on with an expression of satisfaction.

"Obachan! Chamo can't see you anymore. Get ready to lose an arm or two if you keep trying to run!"¹As Chamo shouted her Jyuma rushed at both the Kyoma and Mora.

But with a battle cry, Mora pushed aside the Jyuma. As she killed the Kyoma coming at her, the Jyuma were at the same time trying to restrain Mora. She pushed them aside and in a frenzy tried to make her way forward through their charge.

Meanwhile Fremy aimed her rifle at Tgurneu with a bomb also ready in her hands.

In the middle of the confusion that had already grown out of control, Tgurneu was the only one laughing.

"Ahahah, this is so much fun. You're quite a sight."

No matter how many times she forced through the Jyuma they were soon bearing down on her again. Eventually a group of slug Jyuma surrounded her. They immobilized her feet with a sticky liquid and began to drag her backwards.

¹ 腕の一本二本は覚悟して！

"Let go! Chamo, let go of me!"

Mora tried to shake them off, but she couldn't break free of the slug Jyuma's strength. Mora then collapsed to the ground. And when she desperately tried to pull her body forward with her arms a different type of Jyuma pressed down on her back.

There was only a slight distance left between them, and Mora was staring directly at Tgurneu. But with that final Jyuma's strength, she could no longer move.

Why didn't Tgurneu run away yet? Mora wondered. He said that he had a plan to break the barrier. Why isn't he using it?

"That's good, Chamo. Hold Mora there for me," Tgurneu said as he stood. The next instant the battlefield went quiet. The surviving Kyoma stopped their attacks and assembled around Tgurneu.

And that was when Mora realized what Tgurneu's plan was, and how she had completely played right into it.

Tgurneu didn't have the power to destroy the barrier. He just wanted to exhaust Mora so that she would run out of energy and become unable to maintain the barrier.

Tgurneu had made Mora lose her patience, which caused her to charge blindly at him in a reckless attack.

How much power do I have left? Is it enough to maintain the barrier?

"Mora. I acquired the seventh's crest just over 200 years ago," Tgurneu said. "But in a sense, the seventh's crest is not a fake. The Saint of the Single Flower produced it herself. She had created it for a different purpose than the ones the Heroes possessed."

"Hurry up...what are you getting at?" Fremy asked, her rifle pointed at Tgurneu and ready to fire.

"I searched for a long time for the person who would be suitable to possess the seventh crest, when the time came. For a long time I've wondered just what kind of person should be given the crest when the time comes. And when I made my choice, the crest appeared on that person's body."

As Mora listened to Tgurneu, she clawed at the ground, trying to inch towards him with all her might.

"Obachan! Didn't Chamo say not to move," Chamo shouted.

However, Tgurneu kept on talking as if he wasn't concerned at all. "Mora, you truly are incredible. You are a genuine demon."

You ingeniously pretend that you are a good person and yet at the same time you are under the impression that you are not a bad person. But no one other than me knows the truth within your heart.

"I am grateful that I was fortunate enough to be allowed to meet a human like you. Your love is definitely something that will bring the world to ruin."

The next moment more than a hundred surviving Kyoma charged towards the barrier all at once. At the same time the 50 or so Kyoma on the other side also threw their bodies at the barrier.

When they collided with the barrier their bodies burned up in flames and changed to a dirty mud. Nevertheless the Kyoma one after another charged into the barrier, laying down their lives without hesitation. They were all prepared to die.

When she had made the barrier Mora hadn't imagined that 150 Kyoma would be chosen to die just to bring down the barrier.

The veil of light shook violently. Mora channeled all the energy she had left into the barrier. Yet the shaking wouldn't stop and actually increased.

"Wait.....Wait, Tgurneu."

In the end there was only one giant jellyfish Kyoma left. Tgurneu was leaning his body against it. And his body was being swallowed into the center of it.

"Now that we are at the end I shall tell you. Mora, you are the seventh!"

Tgurneu's entire body was swallowed up by the jellyfish Kyoma which then launched itself at the barrier. It screamed in agony as its body erupted in flames. However, although its body was on fire, the jellyfish Kyoma had managed to pass through the barrier. It then dragged its charred body towards the west, a sticky trail of discharge following in its wake.

"Tgurneu! Wait! I said wait!" Mora shouted, again, and again, and again.

Tgurneu didn't respond. Inside of the jellyfish Kyoma, he disappeared into the darkness.

The few remaining Kyoma followed after him and in the blink of an eye the area grew quiet. And with all of her power spent, Mora slowly fell unconscious.

#

"...Obachan! Obachan!!"

Mora didn't know how long it had been, but when she started to come to Chamo was holding her in her arms. The girl had been shouting her name over and over again.

"...Tgurneu..." was the first thing out of Mora's mouth when she fully awoke.

"He escaped. It's regrettable, but there was nothing we could do. Besides there will be other opportunities to defeat Tgurneu," Fremy said. She was pointing her rifle in Mora's direction, but Mora had no intention of running away.

"...Though I want to kill you right now, for the time being we'd like you to explain." Fremy had her finger on the trigger, but Chamo's Jyuma were standing in front of Mora, blocking Fremy's line of fire.

"Chamo won't let you kill her."

"Step aside."

"Obachan is not the seventh. Chamo doesn't know her reason, but Obachan wasn't attacking us. Right now you're the one who's acting strange."

As the two of them glared at one another, Mora whispered, "Tgurneu said that I was the seventh."

"Chamo is smart so Chamo understands that Tgurneu obviously lied to trick us. But Fremy is an idiot so she's being tricked by Tgurneu."

"It's obvious that Tgurneu was lying. And that's another reason Mora is suspicious."

Though they were unsure of the validity of his claims, Mora knew that what Tgurneu said was indeed the truth. Tgurneu could not lie to her.

I see, so I was the seventh? Well that explains a lot of things that didn't make any sense before. It explains why no one had cooperated with Nashetania within the Illusion Fog Barrier. And why the seventh hadn't done anything when we had all been running away from Tgurneu.

"Step aside Chamo."

"Lower your gun Fremy!" Mora said. "Let's leave whether or not I should be killed in Adlet's hands. I will follow whatever he decides."

"...Is that alright, Obachan? Adlet is an idiot."

"I trust Adlet. He doesn't misread the truth. Have Adlet and the others still not returned?"

"Not yet. I haven't received any contact from them indicating they have found something."

"I see..."

Fremy then looked to Chamo. "Go meet up with Adlet. Tgurneu might be heading right for them. Back them up."

"You're not going to kill Obachan?"

"For the time being I will wait and listen to what Adlet has to say. I won't kill her until then. Of course that's only if Mora doesn't move."

"Be careful, Obachan," Chamo said, and then started to walk off to the east. It didn't seem like she was in a rush, just strolling along at her normal pace.

Fremy circled around Mora and placed about five paces between them. The entire time the sights of her rifle never strayed from Mora's head.

Without looking behind her Mora said, "Fremy, will you allow me to patch up my wounds?"

"Don't move. Use the energy of the mountain to heal yourself."

"The energy of the mountain is not a cure-all. If I don't apply some medicine or stitch up the wounds they won't heal."

"...I guess it can't be helped," Fremy said, keeping her rifle trained on Mora.

There was a fast acting medicine within Mora's boot. Adlet wasn't the only one who had stocked tools on their body.

As Fremy stared at her, Mora removed her outer garb and armor, and then used the medicine to seal up her wounds.

"..."

For three years Mora had been tormented by a nightmare. What if she weren't able to kill Tgurneu and what if she weren't able to save Sheniera? Seeing the sight of that future in her dreams made her jump up out of her sleep, and when Gunner wasn't at her side there were even nights where she couldn't sleep at all.

Each time Mora thought of that nightmare she wished she hadn't become a Saint and she wished she hadn't become so strong. Because it was precisely due to her having the strength to be chosen as one of the Six Flowers that had led to her dear Sheniera being targeted.

And now that nightmare was becoming more and more of a reality.

#

As she treated her wounds, Mora suddenly recalled the past.

It was probably about two years ago. She was in her bedroom, facing her husband. She had asked the maids to take care of Sheniera so that just the two of them could talk. They talked about how she was going to entrust the task of managing the temples to Gunner, how she was also entrusting Weylynn with the instruction of the Saints, and then they discussed the approaching battle.

When she was done talking, Gunner suddenly said, "Mora. If you can't save Sheniera..."

Mora was shocked. It had been taboo between the two of them to even mention that possibility. She would save Sheniera, save the world, and come back. That's what they had promised.

"Stop that kind of talk. Didn't I say I would definitely save Sheniera?"

"I don't want to talk about it either. I don't even want to think about it. But, we have to discuss it just in case."

Mora didn't want to listen.

"...Don't you believe in me?"

"It's exactly because I believe in you that we have to talk about this." Gunner looked into Mora's eyes. "If you are not able to defeat Tgurneu by the deadline...and the situation becomes one where you'll have to weigh Sheniera's life against one of the Heroes of the Six Flowers..." Gunner hesitated, a heartbroken expression on his face. "If that happens, give up on Sheniera. You must not kill one of the Six Flowers."

Mora didn't respond.

"I understand how much you love Sheniera. That's why I am afraid. Won't you end up bringing about the worst-case scenario just to save Sheniera?"

"I won't lose. The Heroes of the Six Flowers will absolutely not lose."

Mora then averted her eyes and Gunner wrapped her in a soft embrace. "You still might be able to defeat the Majin even if you kill one of the Flowers. However, what will become of Sheniera after that? She will have to live her life bearing the burden of being the daughter of the Hero killer."

"..."

"Sheniera is a good girl. And she will grow up to be a wonderful woman like you. But if she were to know that some stranger was killed so that she could live, she would grow up in sadness. She would suffer a wound in her heart that could not be healed. And I don't want to have to face the eyes she would have. "

"...Stop it Gunner. I can't take it." Mora pushed Gunner aside and buried her head in her pillow.

"Sorry. I know you're suffering even more than me...Forgive me." Gunner gently placed his hand on Mora's shoulder. "I'm a cruel father."

"No you're not. Not by any means...", Mora replied. Then with her head still buried in her pillow, she began to sob.

#

The next memory was about one month ago. It was just after Mora had undergone the surgery to insert the eruption gem into her body.

Without waiting for her surgical wound to heal, Mora went and did battle training with Weylynn. After the training she went straight to her room without eating anything and collapsed onto her bed, completely exhausted. And when she had resigned herself to going to sleep right then and there, Mora noticed Sheniera standing beside her bed.

"What's wrong, Sheniera?"

Her expression was different than usual. The bright, baby-like Sheniera had pulled her lips tight and was fighting back tears.

"Mother. Mother...are you going to die?" Sheniera asked. Without hesitation Mora grabbed her daughter, who was clinging to a stuffed toy into a hug. Even Sheniera already knew about the Majin. She probably also knew that Mora would be chosen as one of the Six Flowers.

"There's no need to worry. Your mother will definitely win. The Majin isn't enough to scare me."

Mora stroked her daughter's back in order to put her at ease. But then Sheniera said something that she hadn't expected.

"Are you going to die because of me?"

"What?"

"Are you going to die because of my illness? I....I don't want that..."

Mora had explicitly made sure that neither Gunner nor Weylynn would tell Sheniera anything. So Sheniera should have been under the impression that her sickness had been cured.

But perhaps Sheniera had been aware of the truth all this time. Children from time to time had a mysterious intuition that could tell when adults were lying.

For a long time Sheniera continued to cry. And no matter how much Mora soothed and cuddled her, she couldn't stop. She only stopped when Gunner lifted her up into an embrace and sang her to sleep.

Later Mora found out that for several months Sheniera had been going to the Goddess of Fate's statue in the head temple every day to offer prayers. 'I don't want anything, just please save my mom,' and 'She hasn't done anything bad her whole life, so please save my mom,' were the kinds of things she would say.

And then her prayers changed and she started to say, 'It's okay if I die, just please save my mom.'

#

Mora had known for quite a while that she could not abandon Sheniera, no matter how much she had to struggle in the process. But that conviction didn't come from her love for Sheniera. It came from weakness.

"Fremy," Mora said as she treated her wounds. Her hand was gripping a metal tube about the size of her index finger. Mora squeezed it and sprinkled the medicine within onto her body.

"Would you know if Tgurneu died?"

"...What is the point of that question?"

"I'm worried that even if we kill Tgurneu, a replacement might just assume command."

Keeping her watch over Mora, Fremy thought silently for a moment. "If Tgurneu died that information would be immediately conveyed to the Kyoma. The Kyoma would grieve and mourn and then they would fall into a panic."

"I see..."

If that were so then Tgurneu was still alive. Everything he'd said to her had been the truth. Mora was the seventh after all; there was no longer any doubt about that.

Yet strangely, knowing that she was the seventh actually made Mora feel relieved. The mystery had been resolved and now she didn't need to be afraid of the seventh anymore.

"What kind of relationship do the Kyoma have with Tgurneu?"

"...The Kyoma's loyalty towards Tgurneu is absolute. It is equal to their devotion to The Majin."

It seemed like Fremy was starting to grow suspicious of the meaningless conversation.

"Mora, what are you hiding? And what are you plotting?"

"I am indeed hiding something, but I'm not plotting anything."

"Talk. What are you planning? If you don't tell me, I'll shoot."

"I'll tell you everything after Chamo brings Adlet back."

"You..." Fremy slightly hesitated as to how to continue. And in that moment Mora twisted around and rushed Fremy.

It wasn't an attack that Fremy couldn't defend herself against. And normally Fremy probably would have instantaneously shot Mora in the head. But the bullet she fired only grazed Mora's ear.

Mora didn't dodge the bullet. Fremy had simply missed. She wasn't able to shoot an opponent who was a mere five paces away.

Mora didn't give her time to jump out of the way. She grabbed the edge of Fremy's cloak and yanked it with all her strength. Then she grabbed Fremy's thin body and wrapped her hands around her throat.

"Mo..."

Mora continued to squeeze the artery in her neck until Fremy lost consciousness. Mora then released her neck and Fremy's body collapsed to the ground.

Tgurneu had said that I was the lowest of devils. Perhaps he was right. There probably isn't anyone in the whole world that is as much of a demon as me.

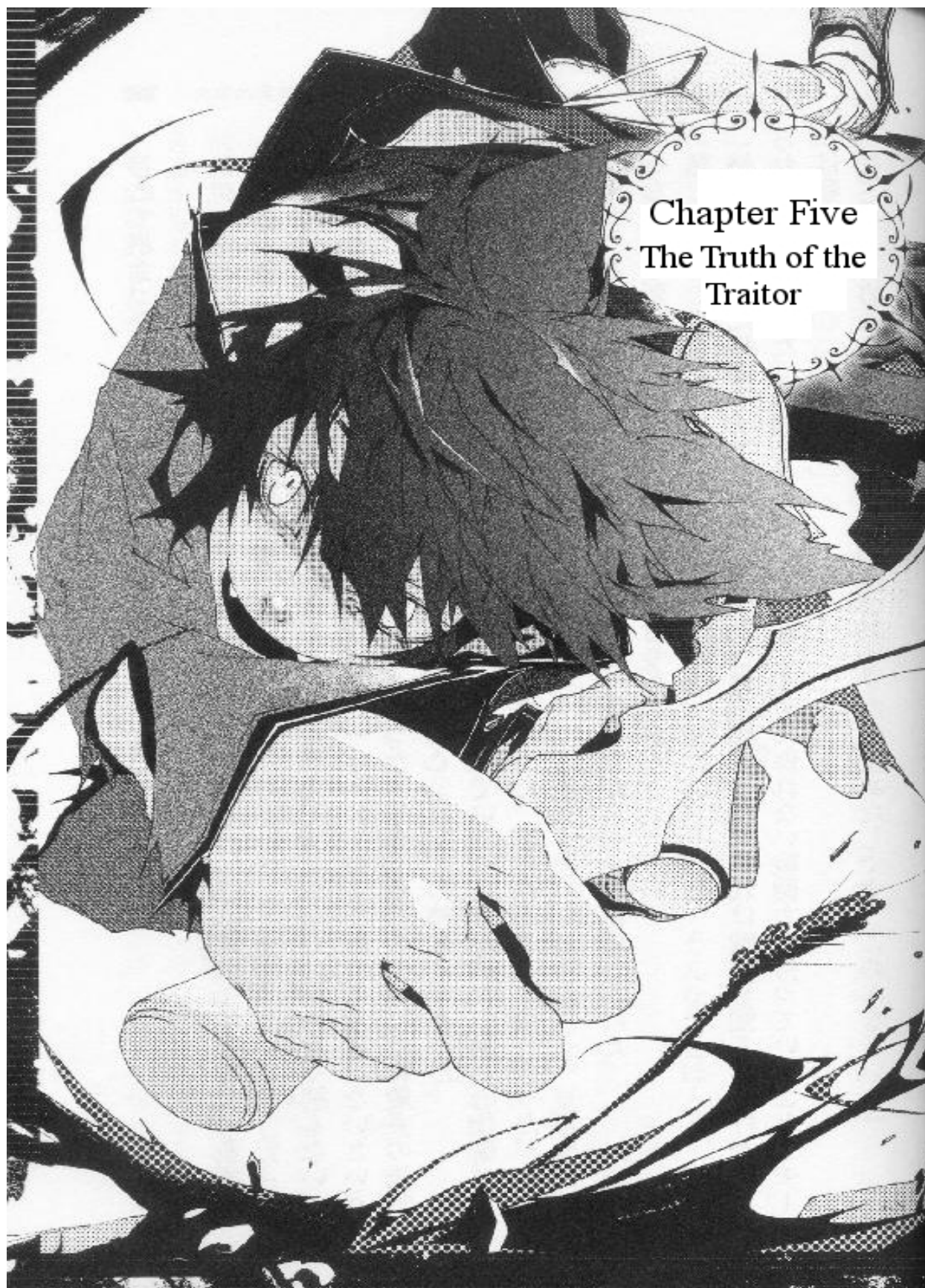
She had promised her husband that she would not kill one of the Heroes of the Six Flowers. She had promised her daughter that she would absolutely save the world. However, secretly Mora had made preparations to kill one of the Heroes. She'd done it carefully and skillfully without anyone noticing.

Mora picked up her gauntlets, slung Fremy over her shoulder and then started to run towards the Eternal Flower.

"I'm sorry, Sheniera." Mora wasn't speaking to Fremy's unconscious body, but to her beloved daughter far away. "I'm sorry that you have a mother like me."

Fremy's unconscious body was breathing quietly atop Mora's shoulder. And it wouldn't be very hard for Mora to snap her neck. But at the moment she couldn't kill Fremy. She had spent a lot of time and effort devising her plan, but she wasn't quite ready yet.

Mora's plan needed someone else's help. Rolonia Manchetta, the Saint of Fresh Blood. Mora had kept the child prodigy close by, became her teacher, and raised her. All so that she could help Mora succeed in killing one of the Six Flowers.



Chapter Five: Part One

The first time Mora met her, Rolonia was a girl who didn't have anything.

#

Half a year after Mora made the contract with Tgurneu, she received troubling news. At the temple of Fresh Blood an unsuitable person had been chosen to be a Saint by the God of Fresh Blood.

It appeared that the new Saint was an orphan girl who had been a servant at the temple. She was a slow child without any redeeming features, and it really didn't seem like she was fit to be a Saint. Even her predecessor had not intended for the girl to inherit the Sainthood.

Mora had wanted to entrust the attending of the miscellaneous procedures concerning the new Saint to Weylynn, but it was a rule that The Head of the Temples' approval was required upon the retirement of a Saint. So without any choice Mora headed to the Temple of Fresh Blood.

When she arrived she found the new Saint washing clothes in the watering hole at the back of the temple. Mora had been told that washing clothes had been the girl's only duty. She was wearing a drab maid's outfit and her hands were extremely chapped and covered in cracks. It seemed like the girl had gotten accustomed to other people getting angry with her and as such had an expression of servility ingrained into her face.

I don't have any time to be associating with a girl like this, Mora thought as she began to speak to the young girl.

"You were the one chosen to be the new Saint of Fresh Blood?"

When the girl heard Mora speak she stood up and turned around. But the moment Mora looked into Rolonia's eyes a faint charge ran through her body. It was a sign that she was confronting a powerful warrior, a feeling that only a person who knew fighting could comprehend. Though the girl seemed timid, Mora could sense that she already possessed a power to be reckoned with.

"I'm...I'm...I'm sorry. I was the one who frayed the undergarments. I'm sorry!"

Having some kind of misunderstanding about something, the girl bowed her head again and again.

"I have something I want to ask you." Mora gently took the girl's hand. "Can you heal the cracks in your hands using the power of Fresh Blood?"

"Huh? What? Um...I was mistakenly chosen to be a Saint so I um... such a thing I..."

"I'm asking if you can do it or not. Give it a try first."

"Yes. I'm sorry, umm..."

The girl stared at the tips of her fingers silently and poured energy into her hand. Her hand then turned to a reddish color and grew hot, before healing itself before Mora's very eyes.

Although she had been chosen by the God of Fresh Blood, she shouldn't have been able to immediately use her powers. Only after undergoing training in how to use their power and after repeatedly speaking to the God of Fresh Blood would she finally become a full-fledged Saint. So for her to be able to do that much now showed Mora that the girl possessed a rare talent.

"I'm Mora, the Saint of Mountains. What is your name?"

"My name is...Rolonia Manchetta. I'm just a servant."

Once again she bowed her head again and again. As Mora looked at the girl she thought about something else. A while back she had come up with an idea, but then realized that it was impossible. *However, perhaps with this girl I might be able to succeed.*

It was an unforgiveable idea. An unforgiveable plan.

#

Soon after that day, Mora decided to look after Rolonia at the Head Temple and gave her special education as a Saint. She declared that within three years she would raise Rolonia to be chosen as one of the Six Flowers.

However, many Saints opposed Mora's decision. Though Rolonia might have the qualities of a Saint, they all said that she didn't have the qualities of a warrior. And surely no matter how you looked at her, it was clear Rolonia wasn't fit to be a warrior.

Whenever Rolonia got flustered, scared, or panicked she would do nothing but cry.

So first Mora taught her the necessary techniques to be The Saint of Fresh Blood. The power to heal other people's injuries. The power to make her whip move by using fresh blood. The ability to analyze blood by licking it. And the ability to use the enemy's blood to inflict fatal injuries.

As she had thought, Rolonia possessed unbelievable talent. She didn't even need to strain herself very hard to memorize those abilities.

Next Mora made Rolonia apprentice under powerful warriors all over the world. The old knight Straud Kahn taught her about the warrior's mental state of mind and drove into her the basic battle tactics of the legendary tactician Thomas Halderoy. Then Mora had her undergo training under the anti-Kyoma specialist Atro Spyker, who instructed her about the Kyoma.

But as she had expected, Rolonia didn't have what it took to be a warrior. She would get scared if she had to confront an enemy. And what made it worse was her fear of hurting the enemy. No matter how many Saint techniques she learned, it didn't seem like she would ever become stronger.

Warriors had to be proud. And in order to defeat an enemy the warrior first needed to believe in their own strength. However, Rolonia was a girl who couldn't do that at all.

For a long time Rolonia had been bullied by the other Saint acolytes at the Head Temple. She was clumsy, her memory wasn't good, and she had grown up hearing that she wasn't useful. As a result Rolonia truly believed that she couldn't do anything.

"If a person doesn't think they can become stronger, they never will."

"Look, Boss. Enough is enough. That kid will never be able to become a Hero of the Six Flowers," Weylynn once said to Mora as they were training her together. "Rolonia is not fit for the warrior's path. Hers is one of helping people."

"You're wrong Weylynn. I know that she will become an excellent warrior," Mora said, but in reality she didn't believe it either.

"Rolonia is a good kid. She's better suited for healing and restoration techniques. It would be better to have her help people afflicted with sickness and injuries, like Toulou-san. Why can't you get that?"

What Weylynn was saying was correct. Even Mora knew that. But for Mora's plan to succeed, Rolonia was indispensable. She had to grow up to be one of the world's leading warriors and she had to be chosen as one of the Heroes of the Six Flowers.

There was no way she could tell the details of her plan to either Weylynn or Rolonia. In fact there was no one in the entire world she could talk to about her plan to use Rolonia to kill one of the Flowers.

"Believe in me Weylynn. That kid will definitely grow up to be a great warrior."

#

After Rolonia had returned from the mountain where the anti-Kyoma specialist Atro Spyker lived, Mora called her to her room and offered her wine. Although she was confused, Rolonia accepted and drank for the first time in her life.

"Rolonia. Have you ever wanted to be strong?"

"Just once, but it was only for a short while."

Mora was surprised.

"I...made a friend at Atro-san's place. His goal was to become one of the Heroes of the Six Flowers...and he was working extremely hard."

What could have happened at Atro-san's place, Mora wondered.

"If I get stronger and become chosen as one of the Heroes, I'd become useful to him, wouldn't I?" Rolonia frantically waved her hands. "Ah, I must not think like this. A Hero of the Six Flowers...that's such an outrageous thought...You Mora-san, or Weylynn-san, unlike strong people like you two there's no way I could ever..."

"...Rolonia."

Mora rose up from her chair, took Rolonia's hand and bowed her head.

"Mora-san. Wh...Why?"

"I think what I'm doing to you is inexcusable."

"Umm..."

"Please. Become strong for me. Fight the Kyoma alongside me. I desperately need you."

"Me, but, but..."

"It must be you!" Mora shouted and Rolonia's body trembled in shock. "I can't say why it has to be you. And I can't do anything else but bow my head and ask. But though I can't tell you anything, please tell me that you will become strong. I need you."

Rolonia shook her head and in a frightened voice said, "Mora-san, I'm scared. I don't know what I should do...seeing as this is the first time I've ever been needed by someone."

"There's a first time for everyone."

"...But..."

There was one quality Rolonia had that was greater in her than in anyone else. She was more pleased to be useful to others than anyone else Mora had ever met.

"What should I do if I can't? It's obvious I'm no use anyway."

"...Give it your all. That's all you need to do. I won't wish for anything else."

"...I understand. I will do my best. If I try really hard, I think even I can do it."

Rolonia smiled faintly. She was delighted that someone was depending on her for the first time in her life. By that same token she was also happy to finally be useful to someone else. And that was the first time Mora had seen Rolonia smile.

#

Rolonia changed a bit after that. She was getting scared less often and the amount of times she apologized for no reason was decreasing. Plus she was serious about becoming stronger.

Then about a year ago Rolonia did something strange in the Head Temple's battle arena.

A doll made out of straw had been set at the center of the battle arena. It had the phrase, 'Kyoma. Really bad guy,' written across its chest. And Rolonia was shouting at it.

"Fool! I despise you! Enemies are bad guys!"

Weylynn was standing behind her.

"No, no! Put more anger into it. Do it again!"

"I'm...I'm...I'm going to knock you down and beat you to a pulp!" Rolonia sometimes had trouble articulating her words, as if she weren't used to shouting.

"You've gotten a bit better. That's the tone."

"I'm...I'm going to beat you dead! You rotten demon! Bastard! I will stop your heart!"

Weylynn slapped Rolonia's shoulder.

"That's it! That's the way Rolonia!"

"I did it Weylynn-san!"

The two of them hugged in the middle of the battle arena. But tired of waiting, Mora finally called out to them. "Is it alright now for me to ask what you two are doing?"

Scratching her head, Weylynn began to explain. "Look, don't you think Rolonia lacks a fighting spirit, or perhaps I should say the will to fight? So if we do this and practice expressing her anger towards the enemy I'm wondering if we could compensate for that."

Mora was naturally dumbfounded.

"Um, Mora-san. I think this is a really good idea. Perhaps with this I might be able to become stronger."

"If there are results then it's fine," Mora said as she tilted her head in thought.

"Rolonia, it seems like you don't really know the words to curse at someone. You have to increase your vocabulary."

"Right. I'm sorry."

"That's alright. I'll teach you, okay? There are probably more than a hundred different ways just to tell someone to die in the world."

"Is that true...? Weylynn-san, please teach me!"

As the two of them tried to leave together from the battle arena, Mora called for them to stop.

"Rolonia, have you forgotten? Today is the day you're supposed to learn healing techniques from Toulo and myself."

"Oh...that's right. Sorry, Weylynn-san."

"Ah it's fine. See you tomorrow."

Rolonia accompanied Mora and the two of them started to head towards the medical facility where Toulo was waiting.

"Today will be an intense lesson. You are also going to participate in Toulo's surgery. While Toulo is cutting out the affected part, you will make the patient's blood continue to circulate and keep their heart beating. You will have to stop their blood from spilling out in conjunction with your blood increasing technique so that the patient doesn't bleed to death. Stay on your toes."

"Right!"

Rolonia had developed remarkably. She had mastered many medical techniques and enthusiastically studied the composition of human bodies. Her ability to heal others was no longer inferior to Mora's. And though it was only by a little bit, she was also becoming a better fighter.

Mora recognized another value Rolonia possessed. The fact that Rolonia gave the utmost effort to doing the best she could was impressive. Rolonia put everything she had into what she did, more than anyone else Mora had ever met.

Rolonia had developed exactly as Mora had planned. And after a year she had been brought up to the point where it wouldn't seem strange for her to be chosen to be one of the Heroes of the Six Flowers.

Still, Mora couldn't tell Rolonia her true intentions. She couldn't tell her that the real reason she had raised Rolonia was to kill one of the Six Heroes.

She would be lying if she said that she didn't feel pangs of guilt. However, Mora had no other choice. Both for the daughter she loved and for herself.

#

"Rolonia, the time has finally come for you to be of use to me," Mora muttered as she ran towards the Eternal Flower. Her eyes were looking towards the east where Rolonia was.

#

In the middle of the darkness, Adlet and the other three made their way towards the hill on their hands and knees. Using the light from the gems to illuminate the ground, the group had been searching for the proof that Adlet had talked about.

There were a multitude of traces left over from the battle. There were several Kyoma corpses, the poison darts that Adlet had thrown, the bullets Fremy had fired, Mora's footprints, and places where Rolonia's whip had grazed. As he examined all of them, Adlet searched his memory and sought out the place where there should be proof. He carefully searched the area, combing through the sparsely growing weeds, and running his fingers through the dried sand.

They also had to be mindful of their feet. Adlet and the others were searching for something extremely small. If they accidentally kicked it, it would probably go flying off somewhere. And if they stepped on it, they might squash it.

The time they had agreed upon with Mora and the others was coming close. Adlet looked up from the ground and stared off towards the west, wondering if his companions were safe. And if Tgurneu were still in the barrier.

"Meow!"

About ten minutes after they had started searching, Hans was already making a lot of noise in complaint.

"Be quiet. The enemy will come back."

"I've already reached the limits of my patience. I hate this kind of meticulous work the most, meow," Hans said and flopped to the ground and sprawled down on the earth. Not paying him any mind, Adlet continued to search.

"Adlet what have you thought of? What kind of proof are you looking for?"

"Explaining would be a waste of time."

"But you have thought of something; an answer to Tgurneu's mystery, right? Just tell me that."

That wasn't the case at all. The flash of an idea Adlet had gotten was extremely outlandish. And until he saw proof of it with his own eyes he wouldn't even be able to believe it himself.

"Stop searching. Let's hurry and head back. I'm worried about what's happening over there."

"It's okay," Rolonia replied. "Mora-san is at the Eternal Flower. If something happens she should be able to handle it."

"...Rolonia, why do you trust Mora so much? She's pretty suspicious too."

"She is a great person. For her to be the enemy....is unthinkable."

Hans didn't reply and just continued to lie on the ground, scratching his neck.

#

Mora spotted something unusual with her second-sight. Seven Kyoma had approached the Eternal Flower and had stopped just short of where they would be repulsed by the flower's barrier.

"What do you want?"

"We were ordered by Tgurneu-sama to help you kill one of the Heroes of the Six Flowers." The one who talked was the human-like Kyoma made of rock who had been chatting with Tgurneu.

Just how well had Tgurneu prepared for this? Mora wondered as a chill went through her body.

"It looks like we have wasted our time coming here. Naturally Tgurneu-sama had anticipated this. He had seen you carrying Fremy earlier."

However, Mora pointed her fists at the Kyoma and said in a cold voice, "Leave this place at once. Then go to the southern tip of the mountain and pretend that you are dead. There you will wait for my orders."

"...You still haven't killed them? Why?"

"I don't need to tell you."

"Don't you want to save your daughter?"

"...If you go against my orders even slightly, I will stop my plan to kill one of the Flowers. If you reveal that I am the seventh I will surrender. Is that not clear?"

The Kyoma stared at her for a moment. Mora didn't know the extent of their intelligence, but she believed that they were thinking over her requests and wondering what her intentions were.

"We shall follow your instructions. We now await your command."

"Go quickly. Or do you want to die here?"

The Kyoma immediately began to move.

Well then, Chamo must have heard the gunfire and should be coming back soon. I have to hurry and get ready.

Tgurneu had indicated that she had two days left until the deadline. Adlet and the others were preoccupied with Tgurneu's mystery, and Chamo still didn't suspect her. So tonight was her only chance.

There were a lot of things she had to do. She would make Fremy and Chamo powerless. Then she would lure Adlet and the others and split them into two groups. Then she and Rolonia would create a situation where only the two of them and their intended target were present. After which they would fight with that person and win. If she couldn't accomplish all of those things then her plan would fail.

Mora spotted where Chamo was with her second-sight. She had brought along five Jyuma and was straddling a giant slug Jyuma.

"Fremy! You killed Obachan!"

Chamo had been heading directly towards where Tgurneu had been when the barrier was still up. But when she got there and saw that no one was there she got confused.

"Obachan! Where are you?! Did you die?"

She commanded her Jyuma to search the area, while she herself rushed about the area atop the giant slug Jyuma.

Meanwhile Mora had carried Fremy's body on her shoulder to the cave and was putting her inside. Then she took out a metal tube from her bag and smashed it, causing the liquid within to spray out all around her. Mora then kicked up some dirt to further scatter the liquid all around the cave.

"Obachan! Are you really dead? Idiot! Why did you die?!"

Using her second-sight, Mora could see that Chamo was still looking for her.

"Dimwit! Dullard! Weakling! Useless! Foolish Obachan!"

Mora didn't know whether Chamo was cursing at her or worried about her. But in spite of the situation Mora smiled.

That was when Chamo realized something. She lifted up her skirt and looked at the crest on her thigh.

"Ah, you're alive."

It seemed that Chamo had finally recalled that when a Hero died a petal would fade from the crest

A cold sweat started to run down Mora's entire body. She had to make the current most powerful Saint powerless. And if fortune wasn't on her side then Mora would probably be killed in an instant.

Mora used the power of mountain echoes and bellowed, "**Adlet! Chamo! Come back! It's a trap!**"

"Obachan?"

Mora had used the echoes so that her words would only reach Chamo. Adlet and the others far away on the hill were unable to hear her.

"Where? Where are you?"

"**The Eternal...**" Mora cut herself off halfway, transmitting only those words. As Mora thought Chamo commanded all of her Jyuma to return to the Eternal Flower at once.

Mora covered the shining single flower with a cloth, and then recited the incantation to extinguish the light from her gem.

"Obachan! What happened?!"

Chamo rushed into the barrier of the Eternal Flower. Then seeing that there was no one in the area she made her way towards the cave.

"Don't come near here Chamo!" Mora shouted.

Chamo stopped at the cave entrance. "What's the matter Obachan? Why is it pitch-black in there?"

"...Don't come in. Don't make any light."

"What happened?"

Mora didn't answer. She had to stall for time.

Chamo hadn't noticed that Mora had dispersed a chemical throughout the dark cave. It was a drug Mora had ordered Toulou to make for her.

Primarily it was a drug that suppressed pain from injuries and defended the body against infectious diseases. She had actually been able to use it in a medicinal capacity. And she previously used it to treat Adlet after he was severely injured by Nashetania.

Toulo had tilted her head in confusion when Mora had ordered her to make a large amount of the medicine. The drug was extremely potent. Just dissolving about half a drop of it into water would produce a sufficiently effective dosage. However, if the original liquid were smeared directly onto the body it was quite capable of harming the person.

In addition, as a secondary effect the drug would drain a person's strength and cause a drunk-like intoxication. Even if they just inhaled the fumes, the drug was strong enough to make the person trip up on their own feet.

Toulo had told Mora that though it was a good medication, she couldn't bring it to the Wailing Demon Territory. However, in actuality Mora had stuffed the dangerous base chemical into a metallic tube and secretly carried it on hand.

"...Chamo can't make any light...what do you mean?" Chamo asked.

"You can't come in. Don't do anything."

"That's why Chamo is asking! What happened?!"

Mora didn't dare to give her any concrete information. She had to keep Chamo where she was, so that she could inhale the chemical fumes and trigger the intoxication effect.

Mora had used the drug on herself multiple times, building up a resistance to the chemical so that she wouldn't become incapacitated when the time came. And that time was now. All of her preparation had been for tonight, the day she would kill one of the Heroes of the Six Flowers.

"I'm holding it back, so don't come closer."

"Sorry Obachan, but Chamo can't sit by and do nothing," Chamo said and slowly entered into the cave.

Mora was crouching deep within the cave and staring out from the darkness at Chamo.

"What are you holding back? Where's Fremy?"

"Fremy...she escaped."

That was when Chamo stopped and stared at Mora.

"Hey Obachan, something's not right."

She noticed, but it was already too late. Mora stood up and violently charged at Chamo. Chamo tried to jump backwards to get out of the way, but her legs tripped under her and she fell to the ground.

The Jyuma started to attack Mora. At the same time a slug Jyuma spat acid and an amoeba-like Jyuma's tentacles lashed out at Mora at the same time. And while her body burned and her arms were grabbed, Mora wrapped her hands around Chamo's throat.

There were two reasons why she had waited inside the cave. The first was so that the medicine would be able to take its maximum effect. And the second was so that Chamo's Jyuma would not be able to attack her all at once.

Mora placed her finger onto Chamo's carotid artery and pushed down hard, but not with enough energy to crush it. It only took a moment for Chamo to pass out. And when she lost consciousness her Jyuma dissolved into mud and were sucked back into her mouth.

"...ugh..." Mora groaned. Even with the tolerance she had built up, she was still feeling the effects of the chemical. However, her fight had merely reached the half-way point.

What lied before her now was the crucial moment. Killing One of the Six Flowers.

#

Rolonia stopped searching the hill and lifted her head. The four of them had been looking for clues for a long time and most likely her neck and eyes were tired.

"I can't find it, Ad-kun," Rolonia said in a tired voice.

Adlet placed a hand on his forehead and thought. *Tgurneu might have already destroyed all the evidence. So maybe we should give up and return to the cave.* They were already past the meeting time they'd agreed on.

"Is it okay if I head back already?" Hans asked as he scratched his butt.

"Um...as a request for me...could you please try a bit harder?"

"If you give me some money then I'll try a bit, meow. Call it an advance payment."

"Sorry, but I don't have any money..."

Adlet looked towards the mountain with The Eternal Flower. They hadn't received any contact from Mora yet. So either there was no good news to report or they were in a terrible situation.

As Adlet stared off into the distance, Goldof reached down to Hans' feet. He picked up something that had been buried there and showed it to Adlet.

"...Is this it?"

Adlet looked at the item covered in dirt. Then he took out the chemical that reacted to traces of Kyoma and sprayed the liquid onto it. He gulped when it turned orange.

"Do you know what this thing is?" Goldof asked.

"Meow, what have you found?" Hans finally sat up.

But Adlet didn't hear what either of them had said. A feeling of elation had been welling up from the bottom of his stomach and made his body tremble.

"We've got him," Adlet said. "We've finally got Tgurneu." Adlet placed the item into one of the pouches on his waist and urged Hans to stand up. "Let's return."

Adlet immediately began to dash away from the hill and the other three followed after him in a hurry.

"I now understand Tgurneu's true form. All that's left is to think of a way to kill him," Adlet said with a chuckle. "Alright, listen up. Tgurneu's true form..."

"Wait."

As they ran and Adlet was beginning to talk, Rolonia cut him off.

"...Back!"

Restless with anticipation, Adlet hadn't noticed the noise. It was Mora's mountain echoes coming from the mountain. And when he finally listened to it, his giddy heart froze in an instant.

"...Discussing Tgurneu's true form will have to be postponed a bit," Hans said, and drew his sword.

#

Mora gave the unconscious Fremy and Chamo a narcotic to keep them from waking up for a while. Then she exited the cave, sat down on a boulder, and placed a hand to her throbbing head. But her head wasn't aching out of exhaustion or dizziness.

"...Am I really sure about this?" She asked herself.

You're pathetic, she ridiculed herself. Even though she had decided that she would do whatever it took for her daughter, she was still hesitating.

The faces of her companions passed in front of her one by one. They were unreliable and made her feel uneasy. And there were even times when they had made her angry. However, they were all fine young people. They would certainly defeat the Majin and save the world for her.

And since that was how things would end up, Mora could definitely kill one of them. As she came to that realization the faces of her family that she could never see again floated before her eyes.

Forget about them, she told herself. She no longer deserved to see them again. From that point forward she was going to degenerate into a demon. *No, that wasn't right*. She had already become a demon a long time ago.

Mora stood up, then using the power of mountain echoes shouted, "**Adlet! The Salt Barrier has disappeared!**"

She gave herself a slight pause before shouting once again, "**Come back! The barrier has disappeared!**"

Chapter Five: Part Two

Four lights were swaying back and forth as the group moved across the Valley of the Bleeding Lung. Adlet and the others were running towards the Eternal Flower as fast as they could.

Ever since they heard that the salt barrier had disappeared, they hadn't received any further contact from Mora. And wondering as to why she wasn't speaking to them made Adlet's heart race anxiously.

When they got out of the valley the completely dark mountain appeared in the distance. Adlet could see that the salt barrier had indeed disintegrated.

"It was destroyed, wasn't it, meow? What did she mean it disappeared?" Hans asked.

The barrier hadn't been destroyed, nor was it ripped open; it had disappeared. Adlet couldn't imagine what had happened. The mountain was quiet and they couldn't hear any Kyoma, nor the sounds of battle, nor anything else.

#

Mora climbed a little ways up the mountain, away from the Eternal Flower, and stared out towards the east. She could faintly see four lights. *There's probably only two or three minutes left until they reach the mountain.*

Once again Mora shouted, "**Adlet! Are you still not here?!**"

The four lights stopped for a moment, then quickly resumed. It was clear Mora's mountain echoes were reaching them.

"Tgurneu got away! And the other Kyoma left with him. But...I..." She cut off her sentence there. If she explained the situation in too much of an organized manner it would probably seem unnatural. **"But Kyoma I haven't seen before...came and attacked the Eternal Flower! Shit!"**

Mora once again pretended to be at a loss for words.

"Hurry and get back! The Kyoma are trying to break the Eternal Flower's barrier!"

After she shouted, Mora smashed a boulder and then beat her fists against the ground. Her intention was to make it sound like a battle was taking place. The soundless dark of night would have been suspicious.

After she'd hit the ground a number of times, Mora turned around. Two of the seven Kyoma Tgurneu had sent to her were standing in wait behind her. Both possessed the intelligence of a high class Kyoma.

"You two, pretend to fight me here. Shout and make it seem like you're trying to attack me. Got it?"

The Kyoma nodded.

"After fighting for about five minutes, kill yourselves. If you break your word this will all be for nothing."

Mora once again struck the ground. But she was worried that she was really being deceived.

The four lights approached the mountain. Just a bit more and they would enter the area where her second-sight could reach. Mora exhaled deeply and calmed her heart.

She would now apply the finishing touches to her plan to separate Adlet and the others.

"Fremy! Where did you go? Come back! What are you trying to do?" Mora shouted. Of course Fremy hadn't gone anywhere. She was sleeping within the barrier of the Eternal Flower.

"Fremy! Where did you go?....Adlet! Hurry and get back here! Fremy has run away!"

#

"Where did Tgurneu disappear to?" Hans muttered as they ran up the mountain slope.

Adlet had also been thinking the same thing. The fact that the barrier had vanished wasn't the only thing that was strange. It was just as strange that so many Kyoma had vanished at the same time.

They could faintly hear the sounds of Kyoma fighting in the distance. However, they were very few in number. *Why did the enemy suddenly decide to make a move now?* Adlet wondered. In the mere thirty minutes since they had started running from the hill towards the mountain, the situation on the mountain had unnaturally become hectic.

Unnatural. That word flew across Adlet's mind. *Could it be that it was all a lie? No, this isn't the time to think like that.* Whether it was a lie or not didn't change the fact that they had to return to the mountain as quickly as possible.

"Fremy! Where are you going?" Mora shouted.

Something had happened again. But this time he wanted to ask her back: *Why are you calling to Fremy with the power of mountain echoes?*

"Adlet! Hurry and come back! Fremy has run away!"

When he heard that, Adlet unconsciously came to a stop.

"...Wha..."

Fremy had run away. At first Adlet didn't even know what those words meant.

"Ad-kun, we can't stop. We have to hurry." Rolonia pulled on Adlet's hand, but Adlet didn't move. Hans and Goldof, seeing as it couldn't be helped, also stopped.

"Fremy is headed southwest in the direction that Tgurneu escaped! I don't know why!"

"Meow. What is she doing?" Hans asked in a carefree tone.

Goldof didn't say a word. He seemed to be thinking about something but at the same time not thinking about anything at all.

"Hans! Goldof! Head southwest and go after Fremy! Adlet and Rolonia, you two hurry here for support!" Mora's mountain echoes cut off.

"Fremy-san...it can't be..." Rolonia muttered as she looked towards the Eternal Flower.

"Meow...so she was the seventh after all? I don't really feel good about that answer, meow."

"That can't be it," Adlet replied to Hans. Fremy probably had some sort of plan in mind. And if not, then maybe she was being used by Tgurneu.

"Hans, Goldof, can I leave Fremy to you?"

Goldof nodded, but Hans shook his head.

"Fremy hates me, so I think it would be better if you went."

Adlet felt like there was some other meaning hidden behind his words. However, before he could ask about it, Hans pulled on Rolonia's hand and began to run.

"Meow, meow. Rolonia hurry up!"

"Wa, wait a second!"

Before they knew it Hans and Rolonia were gone.

"...Let's go, Adlet," Goldof said, bringing Adlet back to his senses. They then started to dash towards the southwest as Mora had instructed.

#

The four lights had split into two groups. One group was heading southwest and the other was rushing towards the Eternal Flower.

I've gotten past the hardest part, Mora thought. Splitting Adlet and the others into groups of two had been the most difficult task she had to face. Her entire plan would have failed had they decided to press on as a group of four, or if they had split into a group of three with only one of them going off in the other direction.

"Kyoma, Adlet and Goldof are heading directly for your location," Mora said with her mountain echoes to the remaining Kyoma that Tgurneu had sent her. She then issued commands to them. "Continue to hold them for as long as you live. And after that, die."

The Kyoma stood to their feet; Adlet and Goldof were rushing their way completely unaware of them.

"...Let's go." Once again Mora started to move. She descended the mountain and made her way towards Rolonia's location as fast as she could.

Her only miscalculation was that Rolonia would be with Hans.

Originally Mora had planned to kill Adlet. He was weaker than Mora and if they were to fight one on one she should be able to sufficiently defeat him. Plus Adlet was overly optimistic and naive. If she were to catch him off guard she would probably be able to kill him without much effort.

Even if her opponent were Goldof there was a possibility of success. He would be a foe stronger than Adlet, yet there was a chance.

But Hans was a considerable opponent. He was wary of letting his guard down and most likely a surprise attack would not work on him. And on top of that even his simple fighting prowess was without a doubt superior to Mora's.

But strangely Mora wasn't scared. Since she had thrown away everything there was nothing left for her to be afraid of. Either she would save Sheniera and die or she would fail to save her and she would die. Those were her only options.

She balled her hands into fists and dashed down the mountain slope. She already no longer needed to use her second sight to see the two lights. *I need to win the instant we meet*, Mora thought. Killing Hans before he could draw his swords was her only hope.

"Mora-san?" Rolonia called to her.

At that very moment Mora rushed at Hans with her hands balled into fists. However, before she could hit him Hans threw the light jewel at Mora and the stone emitted a powerful flash of light, burning Mora's eyes.

"Ugh!"

Having gotten accustomed to the darkness, the intense light was disorienting. Mora covered her eyes with her hands and fell back a step.

"Hans-san! What are you doing?!"

As Rolonia shouted, Mora rolled across the ground to the side. She heard parts of her hair being sliced off and she immediately knew that death had passed within several centimeters of her.

"Meowhihi, you screwed up, meow."

Mora barely managed to open her eyes halfway, but she could make out that Hans was twirling his swords round and round.

"Hans-san! What in the world are you doing?! And Mora-San, are those injuries..."

Rolonia grabbed her whip and readied it. Seeing Mora covered in blood robbed her of her voice. She couldn't understand what was going on, and the suddenness of the situation made her legs tremble. Her eyes were darting back and forth between Mora and Hans.

"If I had been Adlet I would have just been deceived, meow. He is a real softy and he would have been in trouble had you taken advantage of that fact."

Putting up with the pain, Mora assumed a fighting stance.

"Hans, I finally succeeded in drawing you out. And since your true identity had already been brought to light, it would be a good idea for you to give up."

Mora was trying to trick Rolonia. If she could draw Rolonia over to her side then they would be able to take Hans on two to one.

"Meomeow? You can lie off the cuff quite well. I had thought that you were a naive woman who had been brought up comfortably, without knowing anything about the world. But you improvise well, meow."

Hans was not worried at all.

"What do you mean?! What's happening?!" Rolonia asked, looking like she was about to burst into tears.

"Mora is the seventh. She intended to kill me."

"Hans is the seventh! He had planned on killing you, Rolonia!"

Both Hans and Mora had shouted their accusations at the same time. Even though Rolonia compared their expressions, she couldn't move.

Maybe even someone like her was able to grasp how strange the situation was. Maybe she was even aware that Mora was lying.

But Rolonia only met Hans this morning, whereas she had spent two and a half years together with Mora. Even if she thought that Mora was suspicious, she couldn't fight her.

"Rolonia, you can watch from over there. But if you interfere I will beat you to death, meow."

Hans slowly moved towards Mora, his advance full of pointless movements and flourishes.

Rolonia took a step backwards and at that moment Mora figured it would be impossible to get her to fight alongside her.

"Rolonia, don't get involved," Mora said as she looked into Rolonia's eyes. "Believe in me."

The next instant, faster than the eyes could follow, Hans jumped at Mora. He slashed at her feet, which she managed to block with the metal plate in her shoes. But just that single attack numbed her entire thigh.

"Umeomeomeomeomeow!" Hans slashed again and again at Mora. He was like a cat chasing after a piece of flittering foxtail grass. And then he smiled like a frolicking cat.

#

"Did you hear that, Goldof?"

Adlet turned around and looked behind him as they ran. In the distance he could faintly hear what sounded like a heated argument. Human voices echoed loudly across the silent mountain.

Goldof was also looking back in the same direction. He too had noticed something strange. For a while neither one of them had heard Mora's mountain echoes. And although the two of them had called to Fremy multiple times there hadn't been a single reply. Also, Tgurneu or his Kyoma were nowhere in sight.

During their dash, the two of them came across the corpse of a leopard Kyoma. It looked like Fremy had shot a bullet through its head. But when Adlet touched the Kyoma he noticed it had grown cold.

"This is strange after all. What Mora is saying doesn't make any sense."

And with that statement Adlet decided to capture Mora and question her in more detail about the situation. There was a possibility that what she'd said about Fremy running away had been a lie.

"Are Fremy and Chamo alright?"

Adlet checked the crest on the back of his right hand. All six of the petals were still there, which meant the two of them were without a doubt still alive.

"They're here."

Goldof drew his spear and within no time five Kyoma had surrounded them. Adlet placed his back to Goldof's and readied his sword and his poison darts.

But the Kyoma didn't come and attack. They just slowly pressed forward. Adlet threw a poison dart the moment he saw an opening, hitting a giant ape Kyoma. Then when it staggered to the side Adlet rushed over and cut it to pieces. But then a stone humanoid Kyoma lunged at him from the side with its fists.

After exchanging three blows with the stone Kyoma it withdrew, placing distance between them. And when the Kyoma didn't move to attack again Adlet realized that their goal was to keep them occupied. And then everything about Mora's objective became clear to him. She had cooperated with the Kyoma and instructed the Six Flowers so that she could split them up.

#

Within the darkness a beast was rushing towards Mora soundlessly. Since she wasn't holding any light, Mora couldn't really see the beast. And the light that Rolonia was holding only barely illuminated it.

"Umeow!" Hans shouted.

With his body bent so low that he was practically grazing the ground, Hans ran towards Mora with frightening speed. He then thrust his two swords forward, trying to slip them between Mora's feet.

She couldn't block the attack, so she jumped away and dodged the blades. Hans then stabbed one of the swords into the ground, bringing his body to a halt and thrust the other sword into the air towards Mora. Hans' body was amazingly flexible; it allowed him to launch an unbelievable attack from an unbelievable posture.

"Guu!"

Mora crossed her arms in the air, blocking the blow with her gauntlets. Despite being a woman Mora was quite bulky. And on top of that she was wearing iron gauntlets and armor. However, Hans' thrust still easily sent her flying backwards.

Hans dashed like a cat and mercilessly attacked with a follow-up strike. In the air Mora used her two armored fists to desperately knock aside the strikes. The force and sound from the impact made Hans stagger slightly. And without thinking Rolonia who had been watching from the side covered her ears. It made Hans' next follow up attack just a little bit slower.

"Meowha!"

Landing on her feet, Mora turned her back to Hans and ran away. She had to put some distance between them before she could re-assume her fighting stance. Mora was on the defensive and Hans' ferocious attacks didn't give her any freedom to strike back.

Mora had never thought that there was this much of a difference between the two of them. Though imperfect, she was a Saint. She was a person who fought with power borrowed from the gods. Her physical strength and her movement capabilities were far removed from any common human.

And Hans was nothing more than a mere flesh and blood human.

"I won't let you get away!"

Mora was somehow blocking his barrage of attacks with her gauntlets. But Hans wasn't allowing her the chance to put any distance between them.

"Umeow!"

"...A, u....wha...what should I..."

As Hans and Mora hectically ran east and west, Rolonia followed after them.

Mora couldn't use the drug she'd used to take out Fremy and Chamo, seeing that if she used it here Rolonia would also be affected. Until the battle was over Rolonia had to remain safe.

As she blocked one of Hans' swords, Mora lunged out with a kick in desperation. Hans blocked it with his sword then made a giant leap backwards. And the instant there was a bit of distance between the two of them Rolonia rushed between them with her whip ready.

"Mora-san, Hans-san! Please wait a minute!"

"Meow. Didn't you hear me tell you to stay back, meow?"

Characteristic of a cat, Hans' smile was quite creepy. It was as if he were saying he would cut Rolonia to pieces.

"Let's talk to each other. Wait for Ad-kun to return and then let's talk after that."

That's definitely like Rolonia, Mora thought. Yet though she felt sorry for the girl, there was no way that Mora could do that. There was no other way to save her daughter besides killing Hans.

"Meow. You're awfully quiet, meow. If you were like you were this afternoon you would be coming at me shouting nonsense." Hans said.

"Uh, ummm..."

Mora knew that Rolonia's screaming was just a routine she did to build up her will to fight. She was primarily still a timid and cowardly girl. Without doing that radical ritual she wouldn't be able to fight.

"Meow, none of that matters anyway. I've just started to have fun. Do not get in the way."

"You're having fun..."

"It's my nature to want to kill strong opponents when I see them, meow. Having intimate friends isn't bad, but what I like most is killing others."

Rolonia took a single step back. Hans was frightening her.

"...Get out of here, Rolonia. This guy is a monster."

Mora readied her fists, but Rolonia didn't say anything. What was in her eyes wasn't trust, but a feeling of doubt.

"Come at me Hans!"

"Meowhahaha, even if you told me not to it wouldn't stop me."

Hans leaped high into the air. Mora then dropped down and clasped her hands together to protect her face. And with her body small to the ground, she desperately tried to survive Hans' attack that was barreling down at her.

#

The five Kyoma had all been strong opponents. Adlet killed one and Goldof took out the other four, which included the stone human-like Kyoma. Then after confirming that they'd all stopped moving, Goldof spoke.

"So, what should we do Adlet?"

They could faintly hear the sound of metal clashing from the eastern mountain. It was not what fighting with a Kyoma sounded like. Mora and Hans were fighting one another, which made it all too clear that Mora had deceived them.

Should we go and help Hans and Rolonia? Adlet wondered but then immediately reconsidered.

"They're alright over there. Someone like Hans will definitely be able to hold out. Hans is considerably powerful, though of course there is a fine line between him and the world's strongest man."

"So then what?"

Reluctant to waste time trying to answer, Adlet started to run.

Right now his concerns were for Fremy and Chamo. Adlet checked the crest on his hand and confirmed that all the petals were still there. For the moment all of the Heroes were still alive.

Ahead of them in the distance was the Eternal Flower. Adlet didn't know what had happened there, but perhaps there was some kind of clue there.

"...Mora is the seventh. But why is she making a move now?"

As he ran Adlet turned over Mora's words and her behavior in his head. She definitely looked suspicious on the surface, but if she truly was the enemy then he was baffled by how she had acted up until now.

Soon they managed to reach the Eternal Flower. When he set foot in the cave he immediately found Fremy and Chamo's bodies.

"Are you alright?!"

He helped Fremy sit up and she groaned slightly, opening up her eyes halfway. It seemed like she had just been put to sleep.

"There's no need to worry," she whispered. "I'm fine."

She then stood to her feet and picked up her rifle.

"What happened?"

"I was tricked by Mora, lost consciousness, and just came to now. Other than that I have absolutely no idea. I don't know why she attacked me or why she didn't kill me."

"...Chamo's alright too," Goldof said as he checked on the young Flower. She was just sleeping and it didn't seem like she had sustained any major injuries.

"Goldof, we'll treat her later! We have to go capture Mora!"

Adlet and Fremy then ran out the cave, and Goldof followed behind them with Chamo in his arms.

#

After fighting for just three minutes, an unpleasant thought forced its way into Mora's head. *There's no way I can win.*

Mora had acquired various skills before being chosen as a Hero of the Six Flowers. And she had also developed many new weapons with other Saints. However, Mora had never anticipated an opponent that could move as fast and as bizarrely as Hans.

Mora's body had been cut to shreds. Blood was gushing out of the severed artery in her upper arm and she had broken ribs from all the kicks she'd taken to her sides. A lot of blood was spilling out from the artery in her upper arm. Both of her legs had deep gashes and she doubted if she could even run anymore. Plus with all the blood she was losing from her head, her eyes were growing hazy and it was becoming difficult to even catch a glimpse of Hans.

"Mora-san, please stop this fight. You have no chance against him," Rolonia said.

Hans then stopped trying to draw closer. "Meowhi. You're still on her side?"

"We don't know if Mora-san is the seventh or if maybe you're wrong and there's been some kind of misunderstanding. So please stop this already."

"No can do. She is going to die here, meow."

"...Hans-san."

Mora's hazy eyes stared at Rolonia. Then with a voice expressing her intent to kill she shouted, "Get out of here! This fight isn't over yet!"

"So that's how it's going to be. Let's go, meow," Hans said and then started to run.

Mora lifted both of her gauntlets to cover her face. She kept her elbows pressed to her sides. Then she bent her knees and scrunched down into a ball. Then from that awfully contorted position Mora leaped backwards. She was trying to protect her body, like a turtle.

"You won't escape!"

Each one of Hans' successive attacks attempted to slip through the openings in Mora's defenses. But with as little movement as possible, Mora continued to hold out, so long as she didn't receive a fatal wound.

"Ku!" Mora spat as she jumped back, intense pain running through her body.

She was desperately continuing to move around so that Hans wouldn't end up circling behind her. However, her entire body was already covered in injuries and she had almost no energy left to fight back.

On the sidelines Rolonia simply stood still and watched their fight, unable to do anything.

Hans was careful. He wasn't impatient and he wasn't rushing. He was simply waiting for Mora's strength to run out. Hans could tell what Mora was trying to do. She was waiting for the moment when a gap opened up in his offensive, which was when she would launch her attack. That was the only way Mora could possibly win.

"Umeow. Don't you think it's about time you surrendered, meow?" Hans twirled his blades. "Well I'm sorry, but it's too late. I can't help but have some fun. I need to end this by killing you."

Hans then recommenced his attack. Mora protected her body like a turtle, just holding out for now.

Unlike Hans, Mora was in a hurry. Adlet and Goldof would arrive before long and they were probably already aware that she had deceived them. Mora would be captured, and then killed.

But if she attacked she would lose. Hans didn't miss any openings in her movements, so the only thing she could do to survive was continue to defend.

Mora couldn't give up. She had to save Sheniera. Having lost everything, that single desire was the only thing Mora had left. If she were to give up on even that then Mora would become nothing.

"You Saints are tough, meow. I'm going to lose my self-confidence if you won't die soon, meow!"

Hans' attacks intensified and Mora was sure that now he was trying to finish things.

One of his swords grazed her head, taking off a portion of her scalp and her hair. Following that attack he cut her legs and she crumbled, dropping to her knees. Then Hans circled behind her.

Mora closed her eyes and used her second-sight to look over the entire area. She couldn't miss the moment when Hans came at her from behind.

"Umeomeow!"

Hans aimed for the center of her back, slightly below her ribs where her kidney was located. When assassins wanted to be sure when killing someone from behind, they would absolutely aim for the kidneys.

Immediately after the tip of Hans' sword stabbed into her back, Mora twisted her body slightly. The blade strayed slightly from her kidney. And mustering all the strength she had left, Mora put all of her energy into her back.

"Uaaaaa!" She shouted and threw her body backwards into Hans' sword.

His sword stabbed through her back and sliced her heart open, sending a cold chill through her body. But putting all of her strength into her back muscles, she tried to stop his blade.

At the same time she extended her legs with all her might and pushed back against the blade stabbing into her. In other words, she was using all of her energy to throw her body onto the blade. If she had ordinary human flesh then the blade would have skewered her and she would simply die.

"Meowga!"

Behind her she could hear a whipping sound. When Mora used her second-sight to check behind her she realized that it was the sound of Hans' wrist being cut open.

Then Hans' blade came to a stop in Mora's muscles.

Hans' sword slipped out from his left hand and at the same time Mora whipped around and threw a kick at his face.

Hans bent backwards and her foot just skimmed his chin. The next instant Hans' body started to shake violently. Mora had kicked him with all her strength, so with just a mere graze it had taken away his balance.

In an instant Mora removed her gauntlets and chased after Hans as he tumbled from the blow. She then grabbed onto the edge of his hemp clothes and pulled him towards her with everything she had.

"Mora-san!" Rolonia shouted.

Mora struck Hans' chest with her palm and could hear his ribs break. Hans then crashed to the ground. She had hit the left side of Hans' chest. If that area was hit with enough force it could temporarily stop the heart and make the victim lose consciousness. No matter how much one trained their body, they could not defend against that attack.

Mora then pulled out the sword stuck in her back and hung it over Hans' body. Then she laid the blade to Hans' carotid artery and pressed it into his skin.

Chapter Five: Part Three

"Hans! Rolonia! Where are you?!"

Adlet was running across the mountain throughout the night. Following behind him were Fremy, Goldof, and Chamo, who had regained consciousness.

For a long time they had heard the sound of metal clashing against metal, but the sounds eventually faded. For whatever reason, Hans had stopped fighting.

Running across the mountain, Adlet swung around the light jewel as he searched for Hans.

"Adlet! Look at your hand!" Fremy shouted.

Adlet did so and saw that one of the petals had disappeared from the Six Flower crest on the back of his hand. The sight caused him to feel a fear that drained the energy from his legs. The disappearance of one of the petals meant that one of the Heroes of the Six Flowers had lost their life.

Who had died? Was it Hans, Rolonia, or had it been Mora?

"Hans! Rolonia! Are you still alive?!" Adlet shouted, much louder than before.

#

She had only won by a hair. If Mora messed up and instead Hans had succeeded in destroying her vital organs, Mora would have been the one to fall. If they could have battled ten times, Hans would probably win nine of them. And that would be due to the differences in their skill.

The battle was finally over, and blood was gushing out from Hans' neck. However, the bleeding started to lessen, and then it stopped.

Mora placed her hand onto Hans' chest, but she couldn't feel his heartbeat.

"...A....aahh...."

Mora stood to her feet. Her stabbed organs screamed in pain as blood sputtered out from her mouth. Meanwhile, Rolonia drew close to Hans' side and placed a shaking hand on his neck to feel his pulse.

"You know what you should do, Rolonia," Mora said. "It's alright Rolonia. Do as I taught you." Mora then staggered away from the two of them. She had intended to leave, but her legs tangled up beneath her and she fell to the ground. Adlet's shouts were also only a short distance away and was getting nearer.

"It's alright Rolonia! Do as I taught you!" Mora said, standing back up. The next instant, Adlet appeared after rushing up the cliff. With her back turned away from Adlet she quietly said, "...You're too late, Adlet."

And that was the end. All of Mora's fight had come to a close and the parasite in Sheniera's chest should have been removed. Tgurneu would not break his promise. He had no reason to do so.

#

Mora declared that she had been the one who killed Hans. Then she told them she was the seventh.

As she spoke, Mora continued to stare unflinchingly at Rolonia who was treating Hans. Rolonia seemed oblivious to her surroundings as she desperately used her healing techniques.

"How's it going, Rolonia?" Adlet asked.

Then right after Fremy followed up with her own question. "Rolonia, you should have been with Hans. What in the world have you been doing?"

However, Rolonia did not reply.

That's good, Mora thought. Mora and the Saint of Medicine, Toulo, had drilled into Rolonia again and again that when she used her healing techniques she should concentrate on that and nothing else.

Chamo walked up to the kneeling Mora and then started to hit her with her small fists. She was screaming as she punched and her eyes glistened with tears. Mora didn't expect Chamo to be so upset about Hans.

I'm probably going to be killed, Mora thought. Everything in front of her felt so far away. She wondered if this were the kind of feeling one experienced before dying.

"I didn't hope for this to happen. I didn't want to kill him. I didn't want to kill Hans or anyone," Mora said. She intended it to be her final testament.

"What are you talking about?"

"I couldn't think of anything else to do. All other paths besides killing Hans had been closed off."

A single tear fell from Mora's eye.

"I wanted to protect the world. I wanted to defeat the Kyoma alongside all of you and prevent The Majin's revival."

"Chamo doesn't believe you."

"And only until yesterday, no, only until an hour ago, I had intended to do just that."

The moment Mora said that Chamo grabbed Mora's lapel and shouted, "Stop lying!"

Mora didn't turn to look at Chamo's glare. Her eyes were trained solely on Rolonia, who was trying to treat Hans.

"...Rolonia, you can't just circulate the blood in his body. It will soon get corrupted. You have to return the blood that spilled out of him."

"Whatever you're talking about, say it to Chamo, Obachan!"

Chamo hit Mora's face, but Mora's eyes didn't waver from Rolonia.

"What are you doing Rolonia? He doesn't have enough blood. Don't you get that? I'm sure I taught you that!"

Hearing her shout, Rolonia finally responded. "Ri...right. The blood...Hans-san's blood..."

Rolonia placed one of her hands on the ground and concentrated.

"I know it's difficult to use two techniques at the same time. But after how far you've come, you should be able to do it now."

With her hand touching the blood-soaked ground, Rolonia took several deep breaths.

"What are you doing Rolonia? Face Chamo! There are things Chamo wants to ask you too!" Chamo said.

"It's no use Rolonia," Fremy said from her position at the side. "His heart has stopped and most of his blood has spilled out."

"...His wrist....it's impossible," Rolonia muttered. But since she was focusing all of her concentration on her technique, it was like Rolonia was babbling incoherently.

"Wrist? What are you talking about?"

"His severed wrist...his broken ribs....I can't heal them."

"What do you mean?"

Staring at the ground, Rolonia shouted, "But someone else could!"

"Heal him? That's not possible!" Fremy shouted back.

"You're wrong! Healing him isn't impossible! The only things that happened were his heart stopping and him losing most of his blood!"

As she shouted, Rolonia's hand glowed and the blood that soaked the ground was pulled back up from the earth. Then the blood coiled about itself and formed into a ball in Rolonia's hand.

"Don't return it to his body like that! You have to get rid of the impurities!"

"Right!"

The ball of tainted blood turned about in her hand, and as it twirled, the sand and mud mixed within was expelled.

"Hans-san! Please come back to life!" Rolonia shouted.

She then pressed her left hand to the wound in his neck and the ball of blood was sucked into his body. Then Hans' pale body started to turn slightly red.

The entire time Rolonia had been at Hans' side she was forcing the small amounts of blood left in his body to circulate between his lungs and brain. And she continued to do that even when she was manipulating the makeup of the blood that had spilled on the ground. Even though his heart had stopped, her efforts kept his brain from dying.

Rolonia had assisted the Saint of Medicine, Toulo, several times with her surgeries. From that experience she had learned and perfected the technique of gathering blood that had spilled out and returning it to the body. Mora had even volunteered herself as a test subject and had Rolonia practice the technique on her.

"Now all that's left is...I have to start his heart...."

With her left hand still pressed to the wound on Hans' neck, Rolonia placed her right hand on his heart. Then she started to use the blood in his body to try and move the motionless organ. Mora once had asked an old person, declared to only have a few days left to live, to serve as a test subject for Rolonia to practice this skill just before he died.

"There's no way....can he come back to life?"

The instant Hans' heart had stopped the God of Words should have commanded Tgurneu to have the parasite killed. The gods understood that one of the petals on the crest had faded and they would have declared that Hans had died. So as he promised, Tgurneu had most likely already freed Sheniera.

Mora had certainly promised Tgurneu that she would kill one of the Heroes of the Six Flowers. However, she didn't promise that she wouldn't bring them back to life.

The first time Mora had laid eyes on Rolonia she had been sure. She had known right then that the girl possessed a rare talent that would allow her to even be able to learn the skill of bringing the dead back to life.

However, what made the issue more difficult was that in order to bring Hans back to life later on, they would have to kill him first. Rolonia only had the ability to manipulate blood, so if Hans' neck or skull were broken or if his heart had sustained a grievous injury, then it would be impossible to resurrect him.

"Rolonia. Is there anything I can help you with?" Adlet asked, now understanding what Rolonia was trying to do. He moved over to her and sat down at Hans' side.

"His breathing...I have to get him to breathe...."

"Leave it to me. I have medical knowledge so I'll give him mouth to mouth resuscitation," Adlet said then leaned down and blew air into Hans' mouth.

Adlet blew air into Hans' mouth. And as Rolonia caused the blood to circulate throughout Hans' body, the bleeding from his severed artery finally stopped.

"No way...you brought him back to life?" Chamo asked. It was natural that Chamo couldn't believe what was happening. Most likely, Rolonia would be the first Saint in all of history to succeed in bringing the dead back to life.

Even Toulo had been unable to achieve that feat.

"...Bwahh!" Hans spat out blood from his mouth. He pressed his hands to his chest and coughed violently over and over. Adlet wiped the blood from Hans' lips and Rolonia rubbed his back.

"Meo.....Meo.....umeow...."

When his coughing stopped, Hans pressed his hand to his neck and screamed in what looked like panic. He just died earlier so it was understandable.

"...Adlet. Can you show me your crest?" Mora asked.

First Adlet checked his crest for himself, and then he turned his hand so that Mora could see. The crest once again had six petals.

Had they succeeded at last? Mora wondered with a sense of relief. Her struggle had been like a long walk across a tight rope.

She couldn't have killed Fremy or Chamo. Fremy was half Kyoma and her body was most likely structured differently than that of a normal human. There was a high chance that they would not have been able to successfully revive her.

And it would take a massive toll on the body for a person to die once then come back to life. Chamo's small body probably wouldn't have been able to handle it. The person she had to kill needed to be Adlet, Hans, or Goldof.

"Mora, have you intended to do this all along?" Adlet asked. "You needed to kill Hans, but at the same time you couldn't let Hans die, right?"

Mora nodded.

"What in the world happened to you?"

#

Mora told them that her story would take a slightly long time, so the seven headed back to the Eternal Flower. Adlet lent Hans his shoulder to help him walk and Goldof was restraining Mora.

"Chamo doesn't understand," Chamo muttered as she walked at the tail of the group. Adlet felt the same way.

When they reached the Eternal Flower, the first thing they did was see to Hans' injuries. Adlet sewed up Hans' severed wrist and braced his broken ribs. At the same time Rolonia accelerated Hans' blood circulation to prevent any potential adverse effects.

Adlet had told Fremy to handle Mora's treatment. With a complicated expression, she stitched up Mora's injuries and applied some medicine.

"Are you alright Hans?" Adlet asked.

Hans made a pained face as he answered. "...My entire body is numb and I can't move all that well."

Mora, who was still being treated, was kneeling on the ground with both of her hands bound behind her back.

"I want you to talk," Adlet said to her.

"Of course. There's no longer any need to be secretive."

With Adlet and the others surrounding her, Mora told them the truth in a matter of fact manner. She told them about the secret pact she'd made with Tgurneu, the reason why she trained Rolonia, the details of how she only had two days left to kill one of the Flowers, and how she was the seventh.

Adlet listened to Mora's story quietly. Then he took out the item he had discovered on the hill from one of the pouches at his waist and stared at it.

I see, so that's what it is, Adlet murmured in his mind.

"...That is everything that I know. I've already prepared myself for what's coming next, so do it quickly."

With that Mora's long confession had come to a close and for a while no one said a word.

"So, you don't know anything about the princess?" Goldof asked, the first to break the silence.

Mora nodded. "Tgurneu didn't say anything about Nashetania to any of his subordinates, let alone to me."

"I see. The princess..." Goldof stopped himself from saying whatever he was about to say and went quiet again.

"This might be a bit difficult. Chamo had intended to kill you, but Chamo now feels sorry for you," Chamo said.

"Are you going to kill Mora-san?" Rolonia asked.

"There was nothing else she could do though. Her family had been taken hostage. Besides, she brought Hans-san back to life."

"I have a somewhat mixed feeling about this, meow," Hans said, a rare display of anger showing across his face.

"...Didn't you willfully fight alone and then lost? It serves you right," Fremy said in a cold tone.

Then Mora spoke. "Rolonia. Not killing me would be far too lenient."

"...Mora-san."

"After I killed Hans there was no guarantee that you could bring him back to life. And even if you were successful he might have been left with severe injuries or disabilities. Yet knowing all of this I still killed Hans."

Rolonia went silent.

"Regardless of the result, I undoubtedly betrayed you all. I need to take a clear responsibility for my actions. And...I don't want to have to keep on living in disgrace as a person who betrayed the world."

"Well, it's unfortunate, but it can't be helped." Chamo scratched her head.

"There's no way I can trust anything I've heard from Mora. We should kill her after all," Fremy suggested.

"But..." Adlet interjected. "I wonder where I should begin."

"What's wrong? Come to think of it Adlet, you pretty much haven't said anything tonight," Chamo said sarcastically.

Adlet however didn't pay her any mind. "First of all, I'll start with my conclusions. Everyone please listen calmly."

Everyone tilted their heads to the side in confusion. Then Adlet quietly, but in a confident tone, said, "Mora is not the seventh."

#

As expected everyone was at a complete loss and just stared at Adlet dumbfounded.

"Adlet. I have absolutely no idea what you are talking about. The evidence that I am the seventh has already been stated. I was threatened by Tgurneu and I killed one of our companions," Mora rebuked.

"Did you not hear what she said? She said herself that she was the seventh," Fremy added.

"Ad-kun...sorry. Say what you like but that doesn't sound right."

Not even Rolonia believes me. This is going to be tough to explain, Adlet thought.

"Firstly, Mora probably had no choice but to betray us. But she did everything she could to prevent us from ending up dead. She fought to defeat Tgurneu with everything she had. Her intent was to defeat the Majin and she wanted to protect the world. A person like that is not a traitor."

"You're right Adlet," Fremy agreed. "She is not a traitor, but she is the seventh."

"There is no proof of that," Adlet declared and Fremy's eye narrowed. "What are the circumstances regarding the appearance of the seventh's crest? How was the seventh selected? We don't have the facts on any of that. Calm down and try thinking. When you get right down to it, the only proof we have is that Tgurneu claimed Mora was the seventh."

"And that one point is probably all the proof we need. Tgurneu cannot lie to me by any means," Mora replied.

"The idea that Tgurneu cannot lie is a trap."

"...What do you mean?"

"Tgurneu's aim was of course to get you to kill one of the Flowers. He was probably confident that you would never abandon your daughter. But underneath it all he had laid out another trap. And that was to convince you that you were the seventh."

Mora gasped.

"Anyone could come up with the idea that a genuine flower had been framed and made out to be the seventh. But none of us had even thought about the possibility that a genuine flower would be convinced into thinking that they were the seventh."

"The person that called themselves the seventh would have to be someone that no one would think could possibly be a genuine Hero of the Six Flowers. I've got to hand it to Tgurneu. That's quite the achievement."

Adlet smiled. "Mora, from what I've heard from your story, even if Tgurneu made a promise with the Saint of Words that wouldn't mean he would be unable to tell a lie, right? The only thing the Saint of Words can do is set up reparation in advance that the person who lied would be forced to pay."

Mora nodded.

"It was actually an unbelievably simple plan. Three years ago Tgurneu pledged to the Saint of Words that he would not lie. And on the surface it was to make Mora willing to come to the negotiation table. But another objective was to make Mora believe that Tgurneu would not lie to her."

"..."

"Mora was under the impression that Tgurneu absolutely could not lie to her. Then Tgurneu lied and said Mora was the seventh. And just as Tgurneu had intended, Mora believed that she was the seventh. Don't you think it's all really simple?"

"Wait. Do you think that I did not suspect Tgurneu?" Mora asked. "I had thought Tgurneu might lie too. But the powers of the Saint of Words are absolute. No one can escape them. Even the Saint of Words herself could not undo the contract."

"Are you saying Adlet that even the Saint of Words' power doesn't work on Tgurneu? That is not possible," Fremy said. "If that were so then Tgurneu would truly be immortal."

"He is not immortal. Only the Majin fits that description. I don't know that much about the powers of the Saints, and perhaps it is impossible to render the power of the Saint of Words ineffective."

"Then what is it? Are you saying that Tgurneu died in order to say that lie?"

"..."

How should I explain, Adlet wondered for a moment.

"After Tgurneu declared that Mora was the seventh, it seemed like he was swallowed up by a jellyfish Kyoma. It wasn't so that he could escape. That was to hide the fact that he had died. As he had promised to the Saint of Words, by telling a lie he had to forfeit his life."

Mora shook her head.

"...That's not possible. He was a Kyoma commander. If he died all of his Kyoma would lose their chain of command and would become a disorderly mob. There's no way he would die just to tell one lie."

"Tgurneu is not dead," Fremy spoke. "If he had died the Kyoma under him would devolve into a mass confusion. Tgurneu is without a doubt still alive."

"Calm down and let me clarify," Adlet said and then paused for a moment. Inside his mind he was sorting out just how he should explain.

"We all fought against a lizard Kyoma that had three wings. It was a Kyoma that we had all thought was Tgurneu. But that was not him."

"...What do you mean?" Fremy asked.

"On that hill I figured out Tgurneu's true identity. Fremy, Rolonia, and I tried to come up with any information that would help us with Tgurneu's mystery."

"That's right," Fremy confirmed.

"The three of us racked our brains over why the stake of the Saints didn't work on Tgurneu. And our conclusion was that Tgurneu's ability would not protect him from the Saints' poison."

Adlet told them about Rolonia's analysis and how he had no ability to nullify the poison of the Saints.

"If that's the case then either another Kyoma or a Saint had helped him. But what ability could make the poison of the Saints ineffective? The power to remove poisons? The power to substitute one's body? Both myself who has inherited all the knowledge of Atro Spyker and Fremy who was a member of the Kyoma worked together to find a solution, but no matter how much we struggled over the mystery we could not think of a Kyoma that possessed that kind of ability."

"So..."

"So was it a Saint? No, it wasn't that either. We went to the hill where Tgurneu had launched a surprise attack on us and searched under the ground.

But there were no traces of any humans. The power that blocked the poison was not a Saint's. At that point I had completely given up. But in that hopeless moment something happened."

"I don't need to hear about all the trouble you went through. Just let me hear what you found out, meow."

"Unexpectedly it was Goldof's behavior that gave me a big hint," Adlet continued, without responding to Hans' criticism. He then told them about how he had found Goldof interrogating a Kyoma in one of the underground tunnels.

"And what that Kyoma said has been on my mind ever since. 'If I had my Master Tgurneu's power you wouldn't be a problem'."

"Why do you care about that?"

"Isn't that phrasing odd? Shouldn't the correct way to say it be, 'As long as we have Tgurneu'? Why did he specifically say, 'With My Master Tgurneu's power'? So from those words I have reached one conclusion. Tgurneu has the ability to give his power to other Kyoma."

"...I've never heard of such a power," Fremy said.

"Giving power to other Kyoma. We only know one Kyoma that has had that kind of power.

It belonged to the strongest Kyoma in history; one that appeared in the great war of the Six Flowers seven hundred years ago. The Demon King Zophrair. You all probably at least know the name."

Excluding Fremy, everyone nodded.

"Zophrair was called a Controlling Kyoma. He had the ability to split his body and place parts of himself into the bodies of other Kyoma. And as a result he was able to increase the other Kyoma's strength. In addition, he would completely control the Kyoma he had given a piece of himself to, and could manipulate them at will."

"I feel like that was certainly written, but..." Mora said.

"Then I realized that the Controlling Kyoma's ability could negate the poison of the Saints."

"Wha...What do you mean?" Rolonia asked.

"Recall how the poison of the Saints affects the body of a Kyoma. First they become mentally confused and their entire body is attacked with a severe pain. The Kyoma that received the poison of the Saints would be writhing in pain and become unable to think normally. As time progress they would completely lose their sense of balance. And then they would become unable to move. Plus they would start to see hallucinations, hear voices, and suffer damage to their memory. And within five to ten days this would lead to their death."

"In other words, the poison of the Saints is what humans call a neurotoxin. A poison that destroys their brain and their motor functions," Adlet said and Fremy looked up as if she had noticed something in his explanation.

"But if the Kyoma that was injected with the poison of the Saints was being controlled by a Controlling Kyoma, and if it didn't move by its own will and was just a puppet, then it would probably have looked like the poison of the Saints didn't work, at least on the surface, right?" Adlet asked to the group.

"...That can't be."

"Tgurneu, no, the Kyoma with the three wings that we thought was Tgurneu was being controlled. Actually, it's better to say that Tgurneu was the Kyoma controlling that three-winged Kyoma."

Hans leaned his head to the side.

"Wait a second. First of all do you have any proof?" Fremy asked. "If that three-winged Kyoma wasn't the genuine Tgurneu then where was he? I have always thought he was Tgurneu. And even if I think back on it now, I can't think of him being a Kyoma controlled by another."

"It's natural that you didn't notice. From the beginning Tgurneu had intended on getting rid of you. So he would have acted in a way that kept you from understanding his true form."

"Who is he? What is Tgurneu's true form?"

Adlet looked around at his companions. It seemed that the people he had traveled with to the hill, Hans, Rolonia, and Goldof, already understood.

"Take a look at this."

Adlet drew out a small item covered in sand from one of the bags on his waist. It was what Goldof had accidentally stumbled across when the four of them were searching on the hill.

"That's not just scraps?" Fremy asked.

"So that's what it was huh? I can't believe it, meow. When you said to search for something small like that meow, I thought you were out of your mind," Hans said.

"This is a piece of the fig fruit that Tgurneu ate."

Adlet remembered how when they had fought with Tgurneu, the Kyoma had suddenly taken out that fig fruit and ate it. At that time he had seen a small piece spill out from the corner of his mouth.

"Fremy. Do you remember in my explanation what the Controlling Kyoma does when it wants to control another Kyoma?"

"I remember."

"To use its power the controlling type gives a piece of its body to another Kyoma. Simply speaking, it makes other Kyoma eat parts of its own body."

"That can't be..."

"This is not just a fig fruit. It is a Kyoma."

After that Adlet took out his chemical spray that would react to the secretions made by the Kyoma. And when he sprayed it onto the piece of the fig fruit it turned orange.

"The Kyoma with the three wings had that fig fruit. And that was the true Tgurneu."

"...I can't believe that," Mora said.

"Mora, do you remember if Tgurneu was eating this fig fruit when you negotiated with him?"

"Sorry. I don't remember. Though I feel like there was something like that..."

"Fremy. Was Tgurneu eating this fig fruit when you were talking with him?"

"I don't remember clearly. He ate a lot of things, but I didn't take any notice."

Satisfied with that response, Adlet nodded.

"Tgurneu had been hiding his true form from you Fremy. He had pretended to be a glutton so that you wouldn't think it was unnatural for him to eat a fig fruit. And he didn't tell you about the existence of the Demon King Zophrair so that you wouldn't be aware of the Controlling Kyoma."

"...If that's the case, then the explanation it leads to is..."

"Tgurneu probably sensed who it was he was fighting, so then he suddenly took out a fig from the mouth in his chest and ate it. And after that his strength all of a sudden increased. Wasn't that when he stopped going easy on us? That was the controlling type's power: to strengthen the abilities of other Kyoma."

Adlet looked at the piece of fig covered in sand in his hand.

"I was surprised too. When it came to Kyoma, I had thought even the smallest would be the size of a human and would have a dreadful appearance."

However, the Kyoma had originally taken all kinds of forms. It is not strange for there to be a fig Kyoma."

"Could that really be true?"

"There is no positive proof that this is the truth. But we cannot deny the possibility of there being Kyoma that exist which we don't know anything about and who have abilities which we also have never heard of. Still, this conclusion does not contradict all of the clues we have acquired so far."

Adlet looked at Mora. "With everything I've said so far, you should understand how Tgurneu deceived you."

"....I understand."

Three years ago Tgurneu had made a pact with Mora. He had pledged that if he were to lie it would be okay for the core in his chest to be destroyed. But that was not Tgurneu's core. It was the core of the Kyoma with the three wings.

"The three-winged Kyoma was nothing more than a tool that the genuine Tgurneu manipulated. For the true Tgurneu that Kyoma was nothing more than a pawn it could use and then discard. From the beginning he had intended to break the promise you made with him when he made a vow to the Saint of Words."

Mora was at an utter loss. It was as if her comprehension was not following the rapidly changing situation.

Adlet spoke to his companions. "Is it necessary for me to specifically explain the reason why Mora is not the seventh? Tgurneu had lied in order to make Mora believe that she was the seventh. And Mora had fallen right into his trap. But she is definitely not the seventh."

"Whatever the circumstances may be, you don't have to tell Chamo," Chamo said with a scowl.

"I'm...not the seventh?" Kneeling on the ground, Mora was dumbstruck. "A person...a person like me...is a genuine Hero of the Six Flowers? That's not a lie? I can't believe it."

"Whether you believe it or not, I am convinced that it's the truth," Adlet said and then extended his hand towards Mora. "Well then pull yourself together. You have to save not only your daughter, but the entire world."

Mora took Adlet's hand.

They had been able to see through Tgurneu's trap, even if it had been half by chance. If Adlet wasn't able to notice the secret connected to Tgurneu's body, or if he had given up on trying to solve Tgurneu's mystery, then they probably would not have been able to reach the truth. They probably would have let her die if they had been unable to realize that Mora was a genuine Hero.

But even if it was by chance, a victory was a victory.

#

Around the same time a lot of people had gathered at the infirmary in the Head Temple. Mora's husband, Gunner Chester, was there. As were Mora's elderly father and mother. Weylynn the Saint of Salt was also present, as were Marmanna the Saint of Words and Lenelle the Saint of Fire. In addition, the one in charge of the official duties of the Head temple, along with the female acolytes who had rushed all the way from the Temple of Mountains, and Mora's personal maids were there.

Since the infirmary's waiting room was not very large, all of them weren't able to fit in the room and instead were filling up the hallway outside the infirmary.

"...Still? That bastard," the Saint of Salt Weylynn said in frustration.

"Mora...I believe in you." Gunner was muttering with his arms crossed in the corner of the room.

30 minutes ago Sheniera had complained about a slight pain in her chest. Gunner then checked and saw that the centipede-like bruise had disappeared.

Has the parasite died or was it some kind of strange omen? Without knowing which was the case, Gunner immediately called Toulo. Soon after, Weylynn and the others at the Head temple also rushed to the infirmary.

Toulo then stepped out of the infirmary and everyone's gaze focused on her. She walked straight towards Gunner. Then she took his hand into her own and gave it a powerful shake.

"The parasite is gone. Sheniera-chan has been saved."

"Way to go Boss!" Weylynn shouted and pumped her fist into the air. She then rushed over to Toulo and hugged her as tight as she could.

Everyone erupted in shouts of joy, shaking each other's hands and embracing one another. There was even someone who ran up onto a table, took off their tunic and started swinging it around.

"That filthy Kyoma! How did you like that?! Did you like seeing our very own Boss do this?!"

Weylynn released Toulo and then went around hugging everyone she could lay her hands on. With otherworldly strength the girl was rushing around and shouting all over the place.

"I wonder if things are really okay and if she possibly killed one of the Flowers." Marmanna said with a dispirited voice.

"There's no way! The Boss obviously beat that giant fool to death!"

Led out by Toulo's assistants, Sheniera exited the infirmary, but she was frightened by all the commotion happening in the waiting room. Gunner walked over to her and picked her up in an embrace. Then as if everything she had tolerated up until then was overflowing within her, she began to cry.

"Hey, let's drink! If we don't drink today then when can we drink?! Open the reserves!" Weylynn wrapped her arms around Marmanna's shoulders.

"Aren't you being a bit hasty? The Majin still has not been defeated."

"We're celebrating in anticipation! All the best to the Heroes of the Six Flowers. To the Boss, Rolonia, Chamo, the Princess, Goldof, and umm, what was that guy called...right, the cowardly warrior Adlet. May they have good fortune in battle!"

None of them knew the reason why Sheniera had been saved. But it was not because Tgurneu had been killed. Right after Tgurneu had lied to Mora, as promised Sheniera had been released.

Also none of them were aware of the battle happening at the Wailing Demon Territory.

Hans had only told a limited number of people that he had been selected as a Hero of the Six Flowers. And there wasn't even a single person who knew Fremy's name.

#

The eastern sky was slowly turning red, marking the arrival of the Heroes' first morning in the Wailing Demon Territory. For a moment Adlet, who had been on the lookout, was captivated by the rising sun.

They had decided to stay at the Eternal Flower until Hans' and Mora' injuries were healed. *Perhaps the two of them would finally be able to move tonight*, Adlet wondered. He was grateful that they had two Saints that possessed healing abilities. It meant that they somewhat didn't have to worry about injuries.

Both the Eternal Flower and the mountains around it were silent. Neither Tgurneu nor the Kyoma could be seen anywhere. And other than Adlet who was keeping a lookout, all the others were resting.

"...Hey, Adlet," Mora said. "Is it alright to let me continue to travel alongside you after what I've done?"

Adlet didn't respond. Mora was in low spirits. She was not pleased that she had survived, and she had even forgotten the joy she had first felt when she'd saved her daughter's life.

She had been deceived by the enemy and then she had killed one of her companions. And she had done it, taking into account that there was a possibility she could not save the companion she had killed.

"Obachan, Chamo can't allow that," Instead Chamo was the one who replied to Mora. "Do you feel good about being tricked so many times? Do you really not feel like doing anything? Do you like being tricked?"

Don't say that to her, Adlet thought. Mora simply stared at the ground, her head hung.

"Hans, I want to hear your opinion," Adlet said. Hans was the biggest victim and so his opinion took priority.

"Well, I know that we have to travel together like this, but...my anger hasn't gone away."

That was to be expected, Adlet thought.

"After the fight is over, kill me. I must atone for my actions."

"Yeah and what will that gain me?" Hans placed his hand to his mouth, an unpleasant smile spreading across his face. "I've got it. Money, meow. The Head Temple is rich right? So I won't stop collecting on my debt until I can see the bottom of your storehouses. Meowhihihi."

"...Is that okay with you?" Adlet asked automatically.

"Money is important. I was born to live a fun and interesting life. But without money I can't do any of that."

As if that were alright, Mora nodded. Then abruptly Hans' face grew serious.

"Mora, I will not forgive any further missteps. We must defeat the Majin, even if you have to trade your life to do so. Understand that that is the reason I am allowing you to live."

"I understand. I will win. Even if I die I will show the world that I will protect it."

After that it seemed that Hans was done with what he had wanted to say. Adlet looked over at Rolonia. In a sense she too was a victim in this.

"Mora-san..."

Rolonia had probably trusted Mora. And Adlet couldn't fathom how a girl would feel after finding out that the true reason she had been raised was in order to fulfill a plan to kill one of the Six Flowers.

"I feel like I cannot forgive you. And at the same time I also feel that for Sheniera-san's sake it couldn't be helped...I have no idea what to do."

Mora said nothing. She just continued to hang her head.

"...There is just one thing though. Thank you so much for raising me."

"Rolonia, I'm sorry. And thank you. Truly, thank you."

The two of them would not meet each other eye to eye. They still were not yet able to resolve their feelings.

"You don't mind if I suddenly change the conversation, meow?"

"What is it Hans?"

Ignoring the gloomy air, Hans spoke in a cheerful tone. "When I died what happened to the crests?"

"...Ah," Chamo shouted. "Chamo saw it. One of the petals had disappeared."

"Isn't that proof that I am genuine? If a Hero of the Six Flowers dies, one of the petals will disappear, right?"

"It looks that way. Is it safe to say Cat-san is a genuine Hero?" Chamo craned her head to the side.

"That isn't proof," Fremy said. "Even when the seventh dies a petal may fade just like with a genuine Hero. We still don't know the nature of the crest the seventh possesses."

"...Meow."

"If someone dies and a petal does not fade then that confirms they are the seventh. However, even if a petal fades when someone dies that is not proof that that person is genuine. Unfortunately, we cannot say for certain that Hans is a true Flower," Fremy concluded.

"Meow. This is difficult, meow. It is a head scratcher," Hans said as he fittingly scratched his head.

"...The seventh," Adlet muttered. He stared silently at his companions as they talked with one another.

In his head a single question was forming.

Tgurneu had made Mora, who was a genuine Flower, believe that she was the seventh. So perhaps the opposite was also possible.

Maybe Tgurneu had acted in a way that made the seventh believe they were really a genuine Flower.

Even though they probably had multiple opportunities to kill the Heroes, in both the battle within the Illusion Fog Barrier and during the battle at the Valley of Spilled Blood the seventh didn't do anything.

Perhaps the seventh didn't know that they were truly the seventh.

And if that were true then who in the world was the seventh?

They had finished one battle. However, they still hadn't found any clues regarding the biggest mystery of all: the identity of the seventh. Their situation was getting even more confusing and the mystery was only growing deeper.

#

A thick forest stretched beyond the mountain to the west. That was the place where the Saint of the Single Flower had lost a finger on her left hand. And so the land was called the Forest of Severed Fingers.

Thirty Kyoma had gathered there. And at the center of them all, a single Kyoma was reading a book. Its giant, yeti-like body had the head of a crow.

The Kyoma then muttered, "This body is difficult to move. Search for a better one among yourselves."

There was a fig fruit in the Kyoma's lap.

"Hey, good morning," The yeti Kyoma said as it looked up to the sky.

A bird Kyoma flew down, landed on the yeti's shoulder and told him something. The yeti Kyoma then closed the book in its hand and thought for a moment.

"This news is hard to believe. All seven of the Heroes are alive," The yeti Kyoma said, and then took the fig fruit from its lap and chewed on it. "Did Mora fail? Was she unable to kill anyone?"

"That is not the case, Master Tgurneu. Mora murdered Hans. However, after that Rolonia was able to bring the dead Hans back to life."

"I've been deceived!" The yeti Kyoma...Tgurneu's new body, slapped his knee. "I see. So Mora had trained Rolonia so that she could kill and then bring them back to life later...it's a preposterous idea. But at the very end Mora had done it and tricked me."

Tgurneu stood up and began to walk around the area.

"It seems that they were also able to see through what you said and grasp that Mora is not the seventh."

"Who realized that? Was it Fremy?...No, perhaps it was Adlet."

The Kyoma going by the name of Tgurneu looked towards the center of the forest. Several Kyoma were burying something deep under the ground there. It was the corpse of the three-winged Kyoma that Adlet and the others had fought.

"...This is a complete failure. They were even able to smash through my back-up plan. Honestly, I should praise them for their struggle."

There was no air of impatience in his words. Nor was there a sense of crisis or anger about his plan failing. On the contrary, he seemed pleased that the Six Flowers had won.

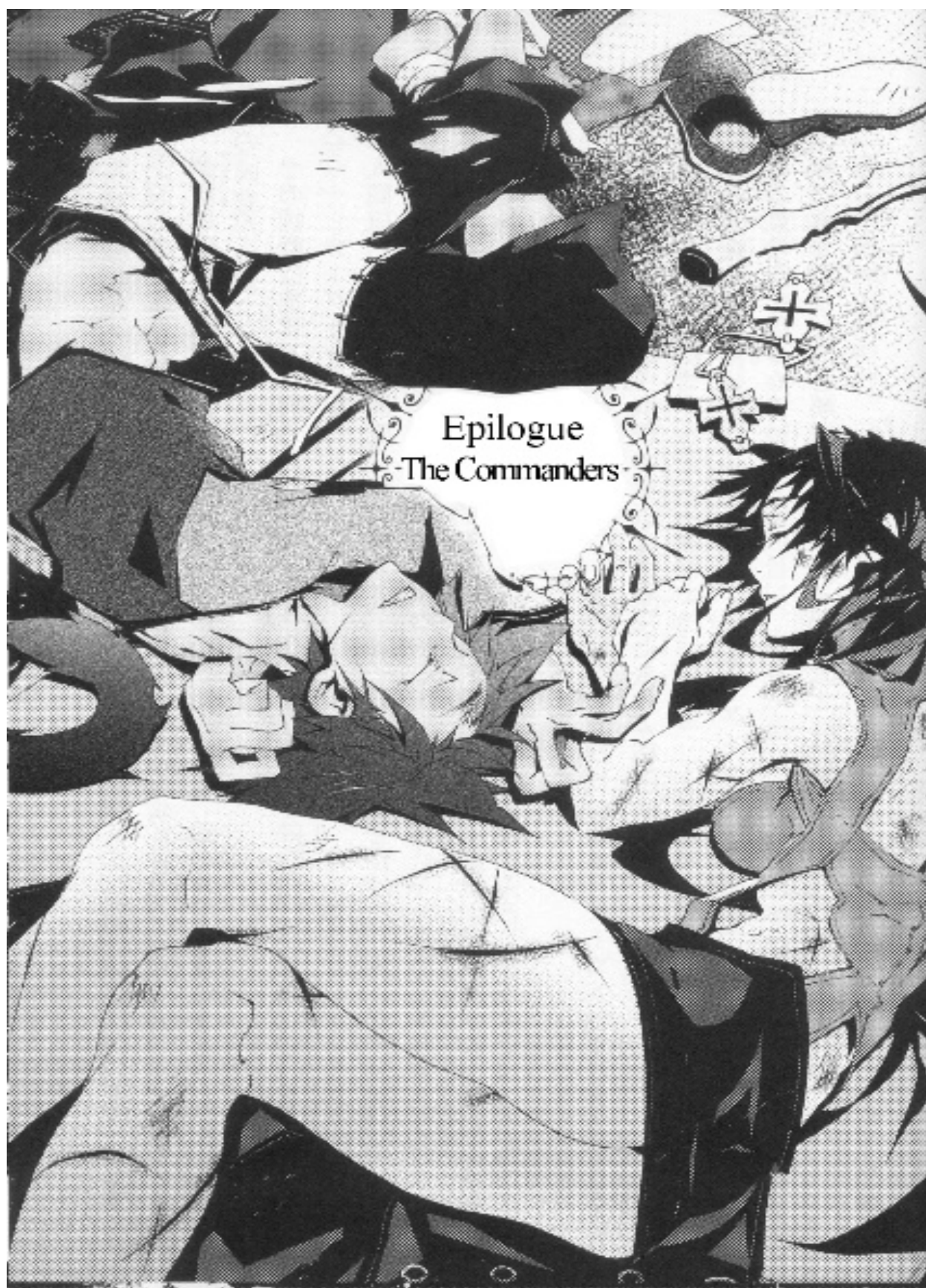
"Well, that's fine. Let's begin the next game. The best thing to do is let what's passed remain in the past."

"Master Tgurneu, what are your orders?" The bird Kyoma said.

With a smile, Tgurneu said, "Tell the seventh to continue not to do anything. They should continue to hide amongst the Heroes and not reveal their true identity."

The bird spread its wings and went off to the east.

And watching the Kyoma fly away, Tgurneu muttered, "Well then, I wonder how we'll play next. These Heroes of the Six Flowers are so much fun."



Epilogue

There was a stronghold at the northwestern edge of the Wailing Demon Territory. It was a crude and primitive fort only consisting of natural stones piled on top of one another. However, both its size and its durability were greater than any of the castle in the entire continent.

A lion stood atop one of the walls of that fort. A silver mane and silver armor covered its entire body, and it was a Kyoma that walked on two legs.

The Kyoma was using an unrefined sword cut from pure obsidian as a cane and had planted it into the ground.

"...Master Cargikk."

A human-sized butterfly Kyoma swooped down from the sky and began to speak to the lion Kyoma. The lion was Cargikk, one of the three Kyoma commanders and was known as the current most powerful Kyoma.

"The Flowers encountered Tgurneu. In their first battle it seems that the Flowers were victorious. Tgurneu lost over 200 Kyoma and ended up retreating."

"You didn't need to inform me of that," Cargikk said. "Only inform me if Tgurneu died or if the Flowers were defeated."

"As you wish." The butterfly Kyoma lowered its antennae instead of its head in a bow.

Cargikk was staring out towards the western sky where the morning sun was rising with an unhappy expression on his face.

"I expect nothing of Tgurneu. His defeat is inevitable."

"...Yes."

"Fighting clashes with his spirit. His life is empty so he has set aside the death the enemy deserves and is merely pestering them for the sake of it. And that is why they were able to win."

Staring towards the eastern sky, Cargikk's eyes were full of anger. He blew out a dark red steam from his mouth. And then a faint haze started to rise from his entire body.

"And although he can think of plans to keep only himself alive, he is only halfheartedly trying to defeat the Flowers. Tgurneu's actions haven't changed from that of a thief!"

The scales of the butterfly Kyoma to the side began to burn and it scattered sparks all around itself. Cargikk continued to speak as he stared into the distance.

"No, that's not right. While he values his own life he casually throws away the lives of his brethren. Tgurneu is a kind of brute that's worse than dirt! I should have killed him that day two hundred years ago."

His anger was not directed towards the Six Flowers. It was directed at Tgurneu, who they had fought with.

"... My beloved children and I, we will defeat the Heroes of the Six Flowers. It will by no means be Tgurneu," Cargikk said, not once looking away from the eastern sky.

#

At the northern edge of the Wailing Demon Territory a number of Kyoma were staring out at the sea.

Sharp boulder-like spears were jutting out from everywhere in the shallow waters. And from the stones, steam that was several hundred degrees in temperature was constantly billowing out. It was a defensive wall that the Kyoma had constructed over hundreds of years. And needless to say it was impossible for either sailing boats or swimming humans to approach.

With that hot steam hanging over the ocean, the Kyoma were busy searching for something.

"...Over there!"

One of the Kyoma found a human-shaped figure floating in the ocean.

The Kyoma that had shouted was extremely small, about as big as a pet dog. It had a soft fur and cute round eyes. It also had a big tongue and a tail. It was a strange creature, not quite a squirrel, a rat, or a dog. And the horn that grew out from its head was more adorable than terrifying.

That Kyoma called out to the human figure.

"Nashetania! This way! Go about fifteen meters to your right then head straight towards the continent!"

The human figure...Nashetania sluggishly moved her arms and feet and swam. She had removed her armor, her sword, and her shoes and was swimming slowly in just her underclothes.

One section of the rock pillars was not blowing out hot steam but just warm air. Weaving her way through that opening Nashetania made her way to the continent and landed ashore.

"Are you alright, Nashetania?"

The adorable Kyoma rushed over to the half-naked Nashetania. And the Kyoma accompanying it wrapped Nashetania's body in a blanket.

"...Dozzu!" Nashetania called to the small Kyoma.

The cute Kyoma was the third commander. The traitor Dozzu.

"I'm sorry, I failed. Not only couldn't I eliminate them, I wasn't even able to kill one of them."

"I know. But what's more important now is that you hurry and dry yourself off. When you've relaxed a bit we shall head to the hideout. It's dangerous around here. Cargikk's subordinates are watching the area."

The group of Kyoma picked up Nashetania then took her away from the coast and headed to the forest. Dozzu walked at the head of their pack, cautiously checking the area for enemies.

Nashetania was coughing violently and her cold body was shivering.

"How was it over there?"

"I failed in the negotiations. Cargikk won't even come over here to hear what you have to say."

"...."

Nashetania cast her eyes to the ground. "...I wonder if this is by chance the end for all of us."

Hearing those words Dozzu stopped. He planted his small legs in the ground and stood right in front of Nashetania.

"What are you saying? Try to say it again."

"...But Dozzu."

Bluish-white sparks shot off from Dozzu's entire body. The electric discharge scorched the grass around him.

"Are you saying you are going to give up here? Do you plan on forgetting our comrades who sacrificed themselves for our ideals?! What excuse do you plan to tell our dead comrades in the afterlife?"

"...I'm sorry. You're right. We are not finished yet."

Dozzu closed his eyes and nodded, as if to say that was good to hear.

"As I said, let's hurry and make our way to the refuge. Warm food and clothes have been prepared for us."

Nashetania and the others advanced carefully through the forest without making a sound.

"Tgurneu must have planned some kind of trap. But even the Heroes of the Six Flowers will probably not lose that easily. If we take advantage while they're fighting and catch them with their guards down that will open up an opportunity for us," Nashetania said.

"That's the spirit. We must have hope." Dozzu looked ahead and spoke with determination. "Cargikk and his Kyoma will not be victorious. Of course neither will the Six Flowers. We will be the ones that win. The world is hoping that we are victorious."

Nashetania silently nodded.

"We will reshape the world with our own hands," Dozzu said.

And then he, Nashetania, and the Kyoma accompanying them disappeared into the forest.

Afterword

It's been a long time everyone. Yamagata Ishio here. How was Rokka no Yuusha 2? I hope you enjoyed it.

At this time the Rokka no Yuusha series is being turned into a manga and will be published in the bimonthly manga magazine 'SD and GO!'. Toru Kei-San is the illustrator.

The illustrations are extremely beautiful and I enjoy receiving each issue's manuscripts.

If you have the chance, I hope that you all will also enjoy this series. So from now please give your best to Toru San, like you have done for me.

Current Events (Although I don't have anything in particular to write)

Something I have noticed recently is that it seems when I write battle scenes I have a bad habit of clenching my teeth. As a result when I reach about halfway in the text, my chin always starts to hurt, without fail. So writing the final volume of my previous series, Tatakau Shisho¹ was tough on me.

I was taught some chin exercises by my dentist so to an extent I'm recovering now.

¹ The Fighting Librarians Series is a 10 book light novel series Yamagata Ishio had worked on prior to Rokka no Yuusha.

However, I think that Adlet and the others will do nothing but fight in the events ahead so I'm worried about what will happen to me. I've thought about whether I should buy a mouthpiece, but I wonder if it will even have an effect.

#

I also went to visit my grandparents' grave.

I was surprised that the graveyards these days have become bright and beautiful. Even the gravestones were really unique. There was absolutely no eerie atmosphere, and I remember tilting my head in confusion and wondering if it truly were a graveyard.

It would probably be difficult for ghosts to appear in a graveyard as stylish as that. Even if they came out as a fiery ball of light it would only seem like a form of graveyard lighting. Don't you think I should think about the people who actually use graveyards a bit more?

#

The other day I purchased a mail order sake glass that can be used to warm sake in the microwave oven. It's a real winner. It has a circular shape, and the top half of it is covered with a shield to block the microwaves. Thanks to this, the heat circulates through the glass as it is heating. And this convection allows the upper half to heat without the bottom getting cool.

It is an exceptional product and though you can make warm sake easily, it has almost no difference in taste when compared to immersing a sake cup into hot water for heating.

The most enjoyable thing I did this winter was mix bainiku² and sprinkle mominori³ and katsuobushi⁴ on top of it, then drip soy sauce all over and ate it as a snack while sipping warm sake.

That is the end of my current news report.

Lastly I would like to give my thanks.

To Miyagi-san the illustrator, thank you very much for your wonderful illustrations once again. And thank you for pointing out the items you thought were unclear about my manuscript. It was truly a big help.

To supervisor T-san, thank you so much for helping me out with so many things. And to all the editorial staff, thanks for all your assistance.

And lastly to all my readers, I hope we can meet again.

Until then, Yamagata Ishio

² Shredded Dried Plum, in this case a Daikon grater to shred the plum. Daikon is a Japanese radish.

³ Baked or toasted seaweed

⁴ Dried, fermented, and smoked skipjack tuna

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